

# Ctrl+P

Journal of Contemporary Art

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**Issue Editor**  
*Judy Freya Sibayan*

**Editorial Board**  
*Flaudette May V. Datuin*  
*Varsha Nair*  
*Judy Freya Sibayan*

**Publishers**  
*Flaudette May V. Datuin*  
*Judy Freya Sibayan*

## Notes:

1. From the documenta 12 press kit handouts
2. Terry Barrett, *Criticizing Photographs*. London: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1996, p.53.
3. Ibid.

## A Community of Viewers

Early this year, Ctrl+P contributed two issues (Nos. 5 and 6) to documenta 12 magazines project, a "journal" of some 97 journals. Editors of participating journals were invited to take part in workshops and lectures sponsored by the project and which were held during the 100 documenta days in Kassel. Judy Freya Sibayan, editor of Ctrl+P and Katy Deepwell, editor of *n.paradoxa* did a lunch lecture on "Regendering Documenta," a conversation that focused on the position of women artists, feminist art theory/history and the perspectives of women in the organization, agenda and reception of exhibitions like Documenta. It is published here in full with the permission of Georg Schoellhammer, director of the magazines project.

Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez, editor of *Pananaw*, Philippine Journal of Visual Arts, the other Manila-based journal included in the magazines project, critiques documenta 12 on the basis of its directors' aim "to free individual works from over-determined and over-determining, stale, identity based perceptions..." Ruth Noack and Roger M. Buerger, directors of documenta 12 "rather than privileging correct interpretation" privileged "direct confrontation with the artwork" thus foregrounding "the authority of the art work proper."<sup>1</sup> Legaspi-Ramirez concludes: "In hindsight, however, insisting on the primacy of 'organic' experience, also easily redounds to a naïve if not orientalist formalism, where a privileging of senses makes for a classic case of curator playing coy mediator."

Further, such a project is premised on the assumption that works of art have intrinsic authority. Works of art have no intrinsic authority. Their authority comes from a process of valorization enacted by a field made up of historians, critics, curators, educators, dealers, collectors, viewers and artists themselves. Referring to this field as "a community of interpreters," art theorist Terry Barrett sees interpretations as "a collective endeavor arrived at by a variety of people observing, talking and writing about, and revising their understandings of complex and dynamic" works of art made by very "sophisticated image and object makers."<sup>2</sup> And art educator Michael Parsons who has written significantly on this community of interpreters claims that as we look at a work of art "we presuppose the company of others who are also looking at it. We are imaginatively one of a group who discuss" the work "because they see the same details, and can help each other to understand them." The artwork "exists not between the two individual poles of the artists and the viewer but in the midst of an indefinite group of persons who are continually reconstructing it—a community of viewers."<sup>3</sup>

Our contributors to this post-documenta 12 issue, albeit a very late issue, belong to this community of interpreters that continually reconstructs works of art in international exhibitions, in local biennales and even of art found in exhibitions that dare to exist parallel to these all-powerful international exhibitions. Matt Price applauds Kassel's artist-led community in organizing an art festival at the fringes of documenta 12 and hopes that such fragile but commendable initiatives be given the support they deserve. Eliza Tan treads with care as she considers her first thoughts about documenta 12. Believing that exhibitions should position "art as a springboard into the world at large," Jason Farago argues for a process of education that will clarify the many things we don't understand about art. Yong Soon Min on the other hand, appreciates the attempt to have a sustained singular vision for documenta 12. Gina Fairley reviews the 10th Istanbul Biennale. And Flaudette May V. Datuin focuses on Tampo Lapuk, an exhibition for the 2nd Dumaguete Terracotta Biennale.

EILEEN LEGASPI-RAMIREZ

I am literally writing on Documenta 12 (D12) from a distance now. Of course it is close to a good five weeks since I came home mulling over whether venturing into the great beyond that is Kassel, Germany (institutional city-host of this half-a-century-old exhibit platform) was more than a mileage trip.

In my mind, this Documenta seemed to be about ‘knowing’ on many fronts. Given its curatorial track of ‘activating’ both space and audience, D12 remains still primarily about the world getting to know Kassel with the flipside (hopefully) of Kassel getting to know ‘the world.’ And in as much as such gestures of international handshakes are concerned, the hands that interlock are hardly ever appended to parties of equal stature. Even more pointedly for our regiment of Asian editors that came on board for the week of August 5 to 12, 2007, the fact that engagement was still an obvious pipedream only underlined how the mission ‘to know’ and ‘be known’ was daunting if not frustrating to say the least. Then again, as far as the D12 Magazines Project (this parallel initiative to the exhibition platform) was concerned, ’twas as much about ‘their’ learning about ‘us’ as it was about us coming to some understanding of why we were being brought into that locus in the first place.

As managing editor of Pananaw, Philippine Journal of Visual Arts, I had come specifically under a chosen tactical peg, that is education (what is to be done?), one of three leitmotifs that Artistic Director Roger Buerger and Curator Ruth Noack laid out as questions to be posed to art and its public, at least as configured by D12. Pananaw volume 6 served up its thematic foci of curation and criticism both as response and pro-active gesture. By 2006, it had become almost immediately obvious that the D12 Magazines Project was a more populist though not as lavishly supported channel through which we, as primarily independent publications (about 90 as of last count) were being brought (maybe ‘sneaked in’ is the better term) through. Given the still obvious invisibility or voicelessness of much of Asia in this exhibit platform, we were quite obviously, the intercultural garnish, at least for that week. Yet by the time we had set foot on Kassel and all the international press reviews had already seen print and online time, the suspicion that this lab experiment in getting audiences ‘to experience’ rather than be shepherded or hand-held in chomping down all the bits and pieces that Documenta had to offer was triggering all sorts of unexpected as well as predictable reactions.

In the middle of the week that our batch of Asian editors had arrived on, a lunchtime lecture-forum on mediation (Documenta’s nuanced brand of art education and engagement) was offering up a phalanx of art educators/mediators pointedly raising questions that were apparently hanging or running through their minds as they’d been engaged through Documenta’s 100 days. That gaps, more pointedly, a perceived lack of references or cognitive handles for audiences who would not fork the additional £ 27.50/€ 3 to score a catalogue or iPod/S-guide only gave credence to the worn down biennale/triennale gripe of these blockbusters being mere cultural smorgasbords. There was much spirited talk about the ‘absence of the text’ and whether there was something wrong with visitors who failed to catch the curatorial drift.

Of course it should go without saying that when one trumpets oneself as being “the most important exhibition of contemporary art”

Top: Documenta 12 magazines exhibited at the Documenta Halle. Photo credit: Judy Freya Sibayan. Bottom: Copies of Pananaw, Philippine Journal of Visual Arts exhibited at the Documenta Halle. Photo credits: Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez



and having “advanced to become an authoritative worldwide seismograph of contemporary art,” contending interest groups of multiple degrees of critical deft will expectedly scream for some form of reckoning.

One particularly insightful Indian man in that forum’s audience pointed out how the text had very much to do with resonances beyond the object/experience within Documenta’s physical spaces. Here, he was obviously hinting at the politics of representation and meaning-making, and how this dynamic plays into how people choose to read or not read texts.

To be fair, Documenta did tangle with the reception and circulation of art in other overtly transgressive ways. In fact, it may have been in these much more deliberately local audience-focused/interventive gestures that engagement was at least unarguably accomplished though still debatably problematic in terms of a bloated confidence in experience virtually exclusive of discourse. Note this excerpt on D12’s *aushecken* project, dubbed “Tricksen” recently posted on the D12 website:

Visibly irritated, the guard hurries past Louise Lawler’s black-and-white photograph *Paris, New York, Rome, Tokyo* and heads toward the curtain: ‘Would you mind coming out of there,’ she demands, pulling aside the curtain obstructing the view onto Friedrichsplatz. Then she does a double take: Standing next to the nine children is an adult woman (Annette Krausse) grinning at her impishly. ‘Oh, I didn’t notice you were there, too,’ explains the guard apologetically, before ushering out the children from their hiding place.

Like *Tricksen*, other apparently instructive initiatives that were openly intended to get people attuned to the inner workings rather than spectatorial spectre of such a venture as Documenta were: D12’s *Project Days* (where art educators prompt students to not only look at the art but observe visitors, draw, describe the behind-the-scenes work, and map out the exhibits); the apportioning of *aushecken* (hedged-off spaces on the Documenta environs for hatching freewheeling ideas instigated by being at D12); and a visitor service called *Inhabiting the World* where youngsters guide adults through Documenta affording an alternative generational view. Then there was of course the overarching D12 mediation programme that insisted on open-ended conversations as opposed to rigidly scripted tours—this overtly intended to play against the ‘education-on-the-run’ stream that most art education models often subscribe to.

Buergel’s own expressed interest to find the interstice between phenomenology and heavy-handed curation was articulated this way in the official online literature: “Today, education seems to offer one viable alternative to the devil (didacticism, academia) and the deep blue sea (commodity fetishism).” That his Documenta presented its own

set of curatorial provocations, there is no doubt. Yet what was made obvious, at least by the time we had gotten there, was that the tension between a romanticization of unpreempted spectatorial cognition vis-à-vis even subtle attempts at contextualization manifested in a near absence of didactic aids may have almost incontrovertibly come across as curatorial conceit. One Nigerian member of the audience at the abovementioned forum articulated how worried he was at the “absence of curatorial conclusions”, and that since the exhibit itself was text, those behind D12 could have considered that “discourse was not the only avenue for engagement.” This to my mind directly played into questions of accountability of meaning producers (artists, curators, audiences included), that is, when the spectator is left to his or her own devices, does the curator then get absolved of responsibility?

Public feedback on Kassel’s streets.  
Photo credits: Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez



What is indeed articulated in Documenta's catalogue is that the curatorial team behind D12 insisted on the validity of an "exhibition without form" or a "radical formlessness," where allowing the influx of non-Western thought through the "migration of form" presumably paves the way for an imaginably efficient cipher—that of the language of contemporary art. In hindsight, however, insisting on the primacy of 'organic' experience, also easily redounds to a naïve if not orientalist formalism, where a privileging of senses makes for a classic case of curator playing coy mediator. In the end, it is perhaps this inevitable locking of horns between text and image that keeps such multi-channel platforms as D12 compelling enough to talk about even when those in the conversation never 'actually' get to physically encounter the exhibits in question.

On an even much more concretely problematic level, we departed from Kassel informed by the ironic case of a Burmese publication whose representatives, from the onset of earlier D12 editors meetings, were literally risking life and limb to engage with this blockbuster infrastructure. In the end, their participation would be ultimately thwarted. Thumbed down for a German visa, the Burmese contingent's travails unfortunately suggest that the Magazines Project may still need to shake off the nagging notion that "the Magazine of magazines" impetus was no mere public ablution—a washing of sins anchored on still resonant colonial engagements in times past and in the continuing future. Indeed there are reams and reams of learning and re-learning to be embarked upon, and this on more than one continent.



Zofia Kulik. *The Splendour of Myself (II)*.  
1997. Exhibited at the Wilhelmshöhe. Photo  
credits: Frank Schinski/documenta GmbH

# Kassel's Artist-led Community in Gentle Revolt

MATT PRICE

As reputations go, Documenta is one of the largest and most prestigious in the international contemporary art world calendar. As part of the grand tour that includes Münster Skulptur Projekte, Art Basel and the Venice Biennale, Documenta attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors during the hundred days it is open every five years, hailing from all four corners of the globe. That many of the art world's professionals and a large number of interested members of the public make the pilgrimage to this pleasant city in the centre of Germany to see a major series of exhibitions of works by international artists is naturally a boon for Kassel's economy and keeps the city's name well known and respected around Europe and beyond. Everyone in the London or New York art scene has heard of or been to Kassel, which is remarkable for a city with only just over a quarter of a million inhabitants. With so much international awareness and such a concentrated focus on the city for three months each time Documenta takes place, one would imagine it to be a great opportunity for the artists living in Kassel and the Hessen region to present their work to such an illustrious audience.

Opening of the festival on 15 June 2007. Featuring Gallery Loyal, the rooftop, the entrance, Mononova cafe and Lolita bar. Photo credits: Ralph Raabe.



Sure enough, the art school had taken advantage of the opportunity to show the end of year work of its students, and so I was disappointed to discover that this exhibition had finished shortly before I arrived in the city, just a couple of weeks into Documenta. The regional authorities also organise a seasonal festival entitled Kultursommer, featuring concerts and events for a broad spectrum of the local population. I was imagining, though, that there would be a fringe festival throughout Documenta, dedicated to the contemporary art scene of the city and region. The idea is not a new one, and in my native country of England, whenever there is a major national/international contemporary art event in one of the cities outside London, the local authorities and regional offices

of Arts Council England try to organise something to promote the local art scene—examples include the Liverpool Biennale and The British Art Show, both of which have had mini festivals running alongside, and often with the support of the main event. Such fringe festivals are invaluable to arts scenes located outside the geographical centres of art activity and commerce.

So what was happening in terms of Kassel and the region's art scene during Documenta? Well, I stumbled across it purely by chance. On my first evening I popped into the bar next to my hotel, reading through all the Documenta press material in the company of a glass of wine. It was a lively place and clearly popular with the younger residents of the city, who mostly seemed to know everyone else in the bar. One of them spotted the Documenta map in my hands and asked me where I was from and if I was here especially for Documenta. He turned out to be a graphic designer who sometimes works on material for contemporary artists. We were soon joined by a young music teacher from the university who seemed very committed to the local creative community. As is often the way, contemporary art and music go hand in hand within local art scenes.

They spoke to me of Kassel, of its problems and advantages, its fears and aspirations, not least the fact that while the area is far from poor, around one in five people are unemployed. He explained that there was a growing divide between the ageing population and the younger generations, and that there is a significant brain drain among the recent graduate community to cities such as Hamburg, Berlin, Cologne and Düsseldorf. With great enthusiasm he informed me that the bar I was in was actually part of a contemporary art association and a hive of artist-led activity, and kindly introduced me some of the people involved.

I met Julius and Julian, two brothers who work for the association and live nearby. They were also really excited about the young creative community in Kassel and keen to talk about its activities and plans. The bar I was standing in is called Lolita and is just a small part of a complex that extends back 50 metres and incorporates a club, two exhibition spaces, two subsidiary bars and an outdoor project space. They took me on a late night guided tour and it soon became clear that they had organised their own programme of contemporary art exhibitions, events and performances to coincide with Documenta and called it the Burgestolz & Stadtfrieden Festival. I was pleased to discover this, as local art scenes are increasingly the lifeblood of national activity and international careers, and interested by the realisation that Documenta had its own fringe festival of sorts.

Julian turned on the outside lights and I found myself standing in a playground that's been specially created 'for' the elderly—a swing, see-saw and roundabout have been custom built with wheelchairs where little plastic seats would normally be. The installation was made by Ralph Raabe, co-director of the association and a practising artist. My guides explain that it is a commentary on the relationship between the local authorities and its alleged lack of engagement with youth culture and emerging contemporary artists. The artist is said to believe that the city caters for the middle aged and elderly very well, but is not very proactive in terms of the younger generations.

It's a sentiment that seems to be strong among Kassel's young creative sector, illustrated by the testimonies and articles written for the magazine that the association has produced to accompany its programme of exhibitions and projects. In a series of interviews, the organisers ask leading young creatives from Kassel about the city. Dolores del Rio, director of the social centre K19 comments, 'Young people should be integrated as a vivid part of the city and not chased away as they are now.' Her position is echoed by UDO, owner of Bar Mutter and programmer of avant-garde film and performance nights: 'I think it is sad that Kassel is very uncooperative with local artists. Every five years they seem to be artist-friendly but in between there's nothing.' And in an impassioned text by Kassel-born Daniel Schoeps, it is claimed that 'You grow up in this city with the certainty of having been born in the wrong place.' The diatribe continues in the following text by Hamid Mehrtash, who comments, 'The wannabe metropolis of Kassel is not only repressive but resistant to any real change. This is particularly when



Leo Stern. *The Child from Elsewhere*. 2004. Oil on canvas cover. 460 x 350cm  
 Courtesy of Galerie Oelfrüh, Hamburg  
 Photo credits: Maja Wirkus

Detail of an image on one of the tables in the Bomber Harris beer garden, with specially commissioned artwork by Bob Martens, featuring documentation of the city relating to the bombing of cities by 'Bomber' Harris.



it comes to engagement with a dialogue with young people.' There is clearly dissatisfaction among the young scene here, and Raabe's elderly playground installation forcefully and wittily reflects this sentiment.

The role of guide is then passed on to a lawyer in his early 20s. I don't think he was even involved in the association and its counter-festival, but he seemed keen to show me one of the exhibitions that had been organised by the artist-led community. He took me to a shop front on the road outside—the first exhibition space of Gallery Loyal, often programmed by three local students, Steffi, Jan and Maja. There was a party going on inside with young fashionistas pulling off some unlikely dance manoeuvres with considerable aplomb. The gallery walls were jam-packed with paintings, drawings and sculptures. The show was curated by Hamburg-based gallerist Christopher Müller and involved emerging artists from Hamburg and Dresden. Highlights included some bricolage wooden rifles and pistols by Marcel Tasler and a splendid series of 16 lo-fi paintings of lo-fi electronic musical equipment by Alexander Dorn. All the works were for sale, but actually getting the prices proved somewhat difficult!

By this point it must have been 2.00 in the morning (long past any respectable journalist's bedtime) so I left the party in full swing. Having spent the next couple of days enjoying Documenta 12, I then arranged to meet up with Daniela Ditta, a local student and unofficial press officer for the Burgestolz & Stadtfrieden Festival. We had a long chat, during which she went into great detail about local issues, describing the different districts and their social makeup, such as Wilhelmshöhe, the 'care-home district,' Nordstadt, distinguished

by its Turkish community, or Brückenhof, characterised by its Russian and Eastern European communities. She told of a recent public meeting entitled 'The Future Conference' in which plans for the development of the region were discussed with representatives from a variety of sectors—commercial, public and educational. The subtitle of the meeting 'Civil Pride and Urban Peace, Facing Demographic Change' was appropriated by the Burgestolz & Stadtfrieden Festival as the subtitle for their own festival, reflecting the belief that while many are proud of their region and keen to become more vocal and proactively involved in its development, considerable frustration remains among its indigenous young people as much as the migrant populations.

Daniela took me on a daylight tour of the art association premises, beginning with a project by Jakobus Siebels, an artist and DJ who moved from Hamburg to Kassel on a residency for the festival. He not only moved himself, but also many of his possessions, building a full-scale replica of the hut in which he hermetically lives. In Hamburg

his hut has a view over the Elbe, so he painted a mural of this view on a large hoarding in front of the hut in Kassel. During the opening days of the festival he is said to have given a performance involving Hawaiian guitars and electric shocks. As we walk along we come across a large painting by Hamburg and Berlin-based artist Leo Stern attached to the exterior of one of the buildings. Entitled *The Child From Elsewhere* the canvas presents a close up of a young lady's face—she doesn't look in the best of health. Nearby to this, in the courtyard of an outside bar, an installation by Bob Martens had been created around



*Hartz Force IV. 2007* The guards Uwe Heinemann, Jean Daniel Tomör and Michael Schmeisser trying to protect the festival from enemy attack. Location: Bomber Harris Beergarden, Photo credits: Maja Wirkus

balance. The installation comprises sand bags distributed around the site, a sonic installation coming through the tannoy and an occasional performance by the Hartz Force IV machine gunners located on the roof.

We move inside to the second gallery space, where a group show, also curated by Christopher Müller, is on display. Featuring eight emerging artists, the show begins with a sculptural installation by Hamburg-based student Nina Braun—a ‘storm cloud’ under which one can stand if in a good mood. Another Hamburg-based student, Patrik Farzar, presents an assortment of mixed media collages, doodles, paintings and drawings revolving around the theme of violence. Four unnamed artists turned up on the opening night and made fighter jets out of empty cigarette packets, arranged neatly on a masking tape runway. Their tobacco-inspired techniques would undoubtedly be the talk of pubs and bars around the world. The violent undercurrent continues in a project by an artist using the nom de guerre of Victoria F Education. During the opening days of Documenta, an artist-led ‘flash mob’ protest was organised by the association in response to student fees, conditions and rents. The banners created for this protest were displayed here as documentation. The artist then stood in the gallery dressed as a dominatrix, whipping any visitors who had not taken part in the demonstration.

Performance and installation by Victoria F. Education. *Bad conscience whips you for free!* 2007. Courtesy of Galerie Oelfrüh, Hamburg. Photo credits: Maja Wirkus

More painting came in the form of Berlin-based Banu Birecikligil, inspired by the news; Martin Bronsema, who presented a crooner with top hat with ambiguous, incomplete text at the bottom, and the aforementioned Leo Stern, who here showed a decidedly strange canvas of a coquettish young girl and the figure of a man standing nearby, along with a butterfly hovering above her head. A second work takes the form of a canvas with two girls, a toddler in the foreground. Somebody suggested she was the daughter of the woman in the painting outside. The final artist was Nina Backman, an artist who has variously lived in Finland, London and Berlin. Here she presented the *Aino Series*, involving six photographic prints and a film featuring herself acting out Aino, a character from the epic Finnish story of Kalevala, a tale of inheritance and the Finnish language itself.

By now it is evident that this artist-led festival has plenty to offer, and what it might lack in finesse it certainly makes up for with enthusiasm and energy. I am keen to find out, though, how the *Burgestolz & Stadtfrieden* Festival was financed and whether it received any public funding. Most of the costs were paid for by the owner of *Lolita*, co-director of the artist association Ralph Raabe and no funding had come from the public purse. (Naturally, the festival was also heavily reliant upon the hard work of a team of volunteers.) From my discussion with the





designated press officer, I glean that a meeting had taken place with an official from the cultural department of the local authorities. Rather than being hostile, he responded to the idea of an artist-led festival with interest and asked why the association hadn't put in a funding application. Sadly—and as is often the way—they had left it too late, only getting organised a few weeks before the festival began. If a strong application had been made and been rejected, it would have been clear that Kassel is not a place that understands its young artist community. As it is, this would not be a fair conclusion, and one is left with a 'what might have been' scenario—what could have been achieved with a decent amount of funding. If Kassel is serious about the community though, by the time the next Documenta takes place it will have taken a more proactive stance and set about approaching the community to facilitate an artist-led contemporary art festival to complement Documenta. It is a modest but perhaps essential step towards an ongoing nationally and internationally-connected contemporary art economy, beyond the global cultural tourism it periodically hosts.

In my home city of Birmingham, England, a good festival for contemporary art exists by the name of New Art Birmingham. One of the few criticisms levelled at the previous edition was from some of the local artists who felt that while the festival engaged with the local context, it did not sufficiently involve the artist-led community. The regional branch of Arts Council England took the bull by the horns and offered to fund another festival running straight on from this year's edition of New Art Birmingham, so long as the artist-led community organised it. And to everyone's credit, they did, coming up with *The Event*, which was also a great success this spring. My hope is that next time, the two can run in parallel or even be merged. While Birmingham's context is not directly comparable to the behemoth that is Kassel's Documenta, it has shown a bold engagement with the local art scene that could have significant implications for arts policy both on a regional and national level and has made visible and coherent the artist-led community of the city and region. Interestingly, one of the curious decisions by both the organisers of *The Event* and the *Burgestolz & Stadtfrieden Festival* was to show emerging artists from other cities. While this demonstrates that the artist-led communities are connected nationally and keen to push beyond the limits of their own local context, it kind of misses what should have been a real opportunity to showcase the best work being produced in the region. This should be their own party as much as for other cities.

One of the things that is most clear about local contemporary art communities is that if there is enthusiasm and motivation, it simply has to be acknowledged and supported on a civic and regional level. They are often fragile and transient communities that gather momentum for short periods of time, and if they do not receive the necessary support and encouragement, they drift away and the cycle of growth has to begin again. If they work, they grow and fuel into the wider professional circuits and economy, and eventually become them. For Kassel this is particularly important, as by the time the next Documenta takes place, many members of the young artist-led community will have moved on, quite literally in many cases. The other question is what happens in between Documentas—is current provision sufficient to sustain and nurture a healthy young art culture that will build into a stronger regional infrastructure for the future?

For Kassel's current artist-led contemporary art association the future is very much up in the air. Soon after my visit, the premises went up for auction, meaning the lease for the premises might not be renewed by the new landowner, depending on their plans and whether they wish to redevelop the complex. If the lease is not renewed, Raabe is said to have vowed to leave Kassel for Berlin. The complex around Lolita bar is a great context for an artist-led community and would surely be the envy of many cities. It would certainly be a great pity if it were to be lost. Was the *Burgestolz & Stadtfrieden Festival* good enough to prove what they are capable of and will it have any impact on the region's cultural policy and future artist-led activity? Time will tell. The next Documenta will certainly be a good barometer as to how well the region's artist-led community has grown and how it has been supported by the authorities. Let's hope the *Burgestolz & Stadtfrieden Festival* is in its sixth year by then...

How does a viewer make sense of documenta 12? The principle question that continues to be reviewed in critical commentary on the exhibition was the first to surface in lacerating reports made soon after the opening, indeed, on the very same day itself.

An “exhibition without form,” the statement made by directors Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack in the catalogue preface might seem almost uncannily pre-emptive; that “people are not really well equipped to deal with radical formlessness” and “tend to feel the challenge deeply...[countering it] by seeking for identity.” Map in hand, I’ll have to admit that I found myself spinning, but not at first because I thought the content or presentation of the show was opaque per say.

The exhibition featured a long, healthy list of unfamiliar names spreading across a sprawling terrain of social and historical contexts but whose exclusions were now being acknowledged, yet not articulated. Turning instinctively to wall labels in order to ascertain nationalities and birth years of artists, I’d found none. The “dispensing of pre-ordained categories” in order to let “art communicate itself on its own terms,” as put across by the directors, was this year’s model of democratization intended. It’s understandable that the withholding of such basic information, however, felt like uneasy didacticism at times, an experience verging on that of a guilt-trip about one’s own unknowing, coupled with an obscuring of normative concepts of display.

Take the Museum Fridericianum for instance. The placement of Polish artist Zofia Kulik’s pair of photomontages, a quasi-architectural build-up of motifs that appropriate orthodox imagery, next to Chinese artist Zheng Guogu’s *Waterfall*, a sculpture comprising calligraphic texts fixed in wax drippings, provides just one case in point. If this formal juxtaposition approximates a comparison of the post-socialist condition and crises in representation accompanying life and art production in Poland and China in a Post Soviet era, how is one, if without prior knowledge of even the nationalities of the artists, able to guess this at all by comparing forms on the surface? Several frustrated attempts at guesswork eventually left me turning to a work’s content for meaning and/or in order to perceive any “migration of forms” in the formal juxtapositions of works. Coherent, relational links that could serve as triggers for contextual reflection were not supplied. Various histories of representation behind works, information for serious consideration of the art and their social contexts were in effect masked by such veiled linkages easily misunderstood as superficial. The richly textured context that could be read behind Zheng’s *Waterfall* was for example, obfuscated by such a strategy: the material spirituality of the work and its recuperation of the humanistic surely preceded by the element of historical turning points experienced by the Chinese avant-garde, and which proved pivotal to contemporary convergences and divergences with tradition. A comparison with Kulik’s thematic of the human motif, and notions of movement and fixity implied in both works, were not altogether remote in this case but became a relation that was just as easily missed because a viewer was left without any bearings.

That the documenta 12 catalogue seems designed as a primary informational source in which contexts are gleaned—names, dates and nationalities; the exclusion of nationalities from wall labels exacts a subtraction of the idea of ‘nation’ from visibility, subtended by chronologies and assigned to the back pages as an index. This, although extremely problematic, is an interesting proposition, one that heralds a belief in art as both medium and message. It was as if a viewer was whispered affirmatives that there are complex layers of information and social content invested in a work except that these were hidden away and could not be culled from first viewership of the exhibition, but only in the afterthought. Viewers were given their homework. Thumbing back and forth through the catalogue, raising one’s hand to ask questions and looking for opinions from

others, communicating bewilderment, researching in libraries, journals, magazines etc. became necessary actions; if these were dictates of the exhibition, they provoked a positive dose of questioning, of action, of doing.

The broad gesture made apparent by documenta 12 was that artists working in the contexts of Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America were a dominant presence in the exhibition, their works interspersed with more familiar Western canons. Removing nationalities from labels did not necessarily, in this instance, mean removing a work from its contexts but perhaps, blurring a focus around a Euro-centre and its 'peripheral' discontents, also compelling a reconsideration of what social theorist David Harvey has termed 'uneven geographic development.' Rather than mobilizing languages of oppression, subjects were instead left anonymous. Their constituent historical formations left outside of a system of art historical categorization meant enabling a return to a ground zero where the political and spatial contexts of art and of a subject's formation had to be examined from scratch.

Was this a tactical move that could be validated in the name of curatorial experimentation? The message conveyed emphasized a certain process whereby viewers unacquainted with what they were seeing were being directed to go find out for themselves. The process perhaps felt a little like being told about glass-ceilings: "If you don't know what it is, then do something. That is, if you're interested and motivated enough, the information is out there if you look and think about it hard enough...p.s: education is self-obligation, discernment is social responsibility." If this could indeed be an invisible message conveyed by the experience of "radical formlessness," it is a refreshing approach, but then again, if so, did the art in documenta 12 ironically end up as ornaments for its agenda?

This approach might have seemed to falter since the spaces and paces of exhibition itself are after all inevitably rooted in concepts of display, methodologies that have traversed beyond white cube configurations to take on their own variable forms and applicability on large-scale exhibition platforms premised as refractive models of critique for art production and alternative modes of circulation within discursive spaces. It is perhaps in that respect that the insularity of documenta 12's educational dictum, not forgetting that the education pack was released long before the opening whereas artists' names were withheld, seems to have fallen ahead of itself. Mixed messages ricocheted between sometimes too quiet subtexts on the relevance of pre-20th century poetics of image and narrativity, the place of the decorative object, modernist conceptions of autonomy, the revision and advancement of various avant-gardes, their vanguards and rearguards, reconfigurations of the Eurocentric, feminist and post-colonial articulations.

The word 'dilettantism' has surfaced in several reviews criticizing poor pairings and shallow juxtapositions of works in documenta this year, but it did come across as a meandering experiment that fell short of its nobler vision, a viewer was in some way encouraged to embrace the amateur's attitude. This, without the negative connotations of 'dilettantism' or the incompetence it suggests, but rather, an attitude of diligence and persistent curiosity about the works themselves, minus the tropes of know-it-all cynicism and certainty. Compelled to author one's own experience, the mind grows keener to grasp after meaning, and when narratives cannot be immediately found, picks up on similarities of content and format, metaphorical connectors between parts of a work or similarities with parts of other works, however abstract, as hints into finding contexts and deciphering messages conveyed by sum totals of initially unfamiliar forms, even unreadable formats of exhibition. This is not to say that an amateur's attitude promotes the passive consumption of art. Perhaps we forget that the very seedlings of interests that grow into processes of social action and communication often come about this way, through a search for sensuousness and in resistance against the otherwise ordinary encounter. And there was plenty to respond to; the ebb and flow of dancers on taut ropes in Trisha Brown's *Floor of the Forest*, strands of hair and silk pressed between embroidery frames, suspended like windchimes in Hu Xiaoyuan's *A Keepsake I Cannot Give Away*.

What powerfully destabilized expectations, and which still haunts me in continuum, is Gonzalo Diaz's brave *Eclipsis*:

A light illuminating a blank, white-washed wall.

You stare at the light and wait. Nothing...

You walk backwards, then forwards, back facing the light. Then, the amorphous shape of your head and body darkening over a black square frame, followed by a question in clean, svelte typography, a miniscule font revealed by your shadow:

DU KOMMST ZUM HERZEN  
DEUTSCHLANDS  
NUR UM DAS WORT  
KUNST  
UNTER DEINEM EIGENEN  
SCHATTEN  
ZU LESEN

Did I come to the heart of Germany only to see the word 'art' under my shadow?

It is perhaps in this respect that the merit of documenta 12 is that it privileges the secrecy of first thoughts and afterthoughts, with a faith that learning comes to those unafraid to step out like babes in the woods—a side-stepping of normative expectations of exhibition in order to allow bodies of experience, of the art itself, to the agencies of artist and viewer-participant.



Gonzalo Diaz. *Eclipsis*. 2007.  
Installation at the Neue Galerie.  
Photo credits: Judy Freya Sibayan



End at the beginning: two days later, after I had seen all but one work in Documenta 12 (apart from those in a restaurant in Catalonia), I walked west from Schloss Wilhelmshöhe to begin the trek up to the Hercules monument, and I noticed dozens of white splotches on the hillside. Not until I got closer did it register: it was a herd of sheep, munching on the grass between the museum and Allan Sekula's outdoor installation. After hearing the word "sheeplike" deployed over and over throughout June, when everyone trudged from Venice to Basel to Kassel to Münster and I went to the beach instead, my hillside encounter with these ovine locals certainly seemed propitious. I went up to one of the ewes—her shepherd was facing away, down the hill, beyond the schloss—and hunched down, looked her in the eye, examined the kinks in her wool. And I thought: *I have never been this close to a sheep before. I know nothing about sheep.*

Why did this make me happy? Was this an achievement of Documenta, this delight in my own ignorance? I had spent the past days contemplating all sorts of bizarre conjunctions: the huge green airbag next to automated electric guitars; the video about a Japanese bondage star soundtracked with Donna Summer's "She Works Hard For The Money;" the McCrackens, the textiles, the Australian paintings that I wanted to slash. Wall text was nearly nonexistent; labels withheld birthdates and nationalities. "At first we are all idiots in front of contemporary art," said Roger Buergel in one of his better pronouncements, and while I didn't feel like an idiot I did feel unmoored, adrift, a poor little lamb who'd lost her way.

It was confusing, it didn't make sense: such were the early verdicts from the flock that had descended on northern Hesse for the opening in June. How could it have been otherwise? After all, Buergel and Ruth Noack's first major exhibition was called *Things We Don't Understand* (*Dinge, die wir nicht verstehen*), and that catalogue, unlike the present one, contains a long essay on the experience of art. For the curators, the world is enormous, half-invisible, and complicated beyond all reckoning. Art's glory—they might even say art's function—is its articulation of the state of the world not through subject matter but, rather, in its very structures: works of art are things we don't understand but can at least try to come to grips with in the mediated space of a gallery.

It's unfortunate that *Things We Don't Understand*, which featured such Buergel and Noack favorites as Peter Friedl, Ines Doujak, and Eleanor Antin, has figured so little in discussions of Documenta 12. If five years ago everyone

who went to Documenta 11 knew Okwui Enwezor's practice backwards and forwards—or so it felt to me, since his two most important shows had passed through my hometown, New York—this year things were different: even Germans were clueless about Buergel and Noack, and the flock in Miami were too busy jockeying for a cabana at the Delano to see *How Do We Want To Be Governed?* during 2004's art fair. Not a single library or bookstore anywhere in London, my current home, has a word of theirs.

As the couple criss-crossed the art network for a series of press conferences, the Roger and Ruth Show (she the smiling, gracious host, he the laconic, quipping sidekick) only made things hazier still. This being the first Documenta since the advent of YouTube, I had already watched Noack speak to a group in Tokyo; when I saw her and Buergel in London it was hardly different, since I was spirited into an overflow



Alan Sekula. *Shipwreck and Workers* (*Version 3 for Kassel*). 2007. Installation at the Bergpark Wilhelmshöhe. Photo credits: Judy Freya Sibayan.

room at the Royal College of Art and watched their lecture on closed-circuit television. It was content as much as delivery, though, that left us puzzled. Students sitting under a tree somewhere in India—was that it? Could anyone be so optimistic and so (willfully, strategically) naïve to jettison so many lessons of the twentieth century? Over pints at my favorite Chelsea pub my friends compared notes. We didn't have many: something about education, and an injunction on air conditioning.

In Kassel, I admit, I was scared for a few minutes. I had sucked down a currywurst and beer alongside Sanja Ivecovic's blooming *Red Square*, but I felt unfortified for the first few galleries of the Fridericianum. I tried to fall back on my art world habits, asking not *What is it?* but privileging *How does it fit with what I know?* Which got me nowhere. Buergel and Noack intentionally withheld context, wouldn't play the shepherd and guide me along. When I saw a photograph documenting a Buenos Aires gallery intervention first on the first floor, then repeated upstairs, I thought that perhaps I was losing my mind.

Buergel and Noack's playful, childlike style is something I had to settle into. It didn't take long to realize that my art historical tools wouldn't help me: I could write you a few pages on what a gold McCracken might have to do with Klee's angel of history, but throw in Japanese bondage and "She Works Hard For The Money" and the task becomes silly, impossible. Yet the flipside of hard criticism informed by the history of art is scarier still: aestheticism, lazy proclamations to just look and enjoy.

Documenta 12 was an attempt to navigate this Scylla and Charybdis situation where didacticism and dilettantism seem the only options. Buergel had suggested that education, might provide a middle ground here, but it wasn't until I got to Kassel that I really understood what that might mean. "Education," to be sure, is a woeful translation of *Bildung*, which encapsulates not only learning in schools but a kind of moral self-construction: the French *formation* captures it better. When I imagined the concept of exhibition-as-education I had expected something much more rigorous, the shepherd leading the flock. But Documenta was precisely the opposite: instead of explicating art, this aesthetic education inhered in a refusal, perhaps even an inability, to do so. The goal of education, for Buergel and Noack, is not to clarify art—art is things we don't understand. On the contrary, *ästetische Bildung* uses things we don't understand as means and not ends, positions art as a springboard into the world at large.

In the Aue-Pavilion someone had written "Bildung für alle!" on Gerwald Rockenschaub's blackboard, and it's the obviousness and the naiveté of that graffiti that make it so apt, and so true. With every day there remain fewer and fewer things you can be clueless about. You live, you learn. You have a moral obligation to be intelligent, to care, to pay attention. But art's refusal to align with the world at large, its renunciation of clarity for what Levinas called "the impersonal, non-substantive event of the night," gives it a tremendous power. Such was the unstintingly optimistic claim of Documenta 12: that, if put in an educative framework, art can clarify the conditions of the world even as it refuses to clarify itself.



Gerwald Rockenschaub.  
*Klassenzimmer*.  
2007. Installation at the  
Aue Pavilion.  
Photo credits: Julia  
Zimmermann/  
documenta GmbH.

# An Attempt to Sustain a Singular Vision

YOONG SOON MIN

As a Documenta virgin, as it were, I went to Kassel with a blank slate of prior experiences for comparison but with high expectations stemming from its reputation (set high especially by the immediate predecessors, artistic directors Catherine David and Okwui Enwezor), as the yardstick by which all other large-scale international exhibitions are measured. By and large, these high expectations were met, partially in reaction and contrast to my disappointment with the Münster Sculpture Project, the stop before Documenta on my German tour. My response to Documenta is based primarily on two and a half days of a concerted effort to visit all the sites and to see as much of the over 500 works as possible, which left little time for relaxation or reflection. One of the pitfalls of buying the catalog at the very end for reading back home in Los Angeles is that I realized too late that I missed certain works such as the Thai artist Sakarin Krue-on's *Terraced Rice Field Art Project*, an outlying project even though I was in its vicinity.

Let me start with the good before I launch into the bad and the ugly. First and foremost, I was riveted by Inigo Manglano-Ovalle's 2007 *Phantom Truck*—a full-scale model of the supposed Iraqi mobile biological—weapons lab that was touted by the

Bush administration as evidence to justify U.S. invasion of Iraq. This work was flawlessly staged in two adjoining rooms with the first room empty but for a small radio transmitting static. This room was infused with orange light that cast an orange (as in agent orange?) chiaroscuro effect on the hulking, mysterious structure in an otherwise blackened room. Equally captivating were Tanaka Atsuko's 1956 *Electric Dress*—an electronic bling-bling dress way ahead of its time, and two other distinct works by her in the exhibition. I was also appreciative of the inclusion of the underrated artist, Eleanor Antin, and her many works in the exhibition including the 1977 installation, *The Angel of Mercy*, which was new to me and impressive in its incisive mix of wit and political analysis. Other works of note: Guy Tillim's forceful and unsettling color photos of crowd scenes during the lead-up to the first free presidential and parliamentary elections in that country in his 2006 *Congo Democratic*; Halil Altindere's 2007 video, *Dengbejs* which presents an intimate portrayal of men singing songs that recount contemporary events in the heart of Kurdish Turkey in a carpeted room that turns out to be located in amidst a metropolitan setting; Trisha Brown's 2007 *Floor of the Forest* a delightful interweave of movement and sculpture; Sanja Ivekovic's 2007 poppy field with bright red buds that enlivened the main campus of Documenta; and the various Kerry James Marshall's paintings scattered throughout the several buildings but especially his 2007 *Dailies (Rythm Mastr)* a satirical epic narrative of sorts in comic book format depicting African American issues which shows Marshall to be an equally



Inigo Manglano-Ovalle. *The Radio*. 2007. Installation at the Documenta-Halle. Photo credits: Katrin Schilling/documenta GmbH

deft graphic artist. Another highlight was attending a film screening at the pleasant Gloria Kino theater of a beautifully restored 1957 film, *Pyaasa* (Thirst) by Guru Dutt, a key filmmaker during India's Golden Age of cinema. Filmed in lushly evocative B&W, this melodrama about a struggling poet is set in the early years of independence from British

rule, already tinged with a sense of disillusionment. Finally, I want to spotlight Artur Zmijewski's 2007 video entitled *Them*, showcased at the Kulturzentrum Schlachthof, a small alternative art center in an Arab neighborhood, a short distance from the main Documenta campus. This video documents a social experiment of sorts in which four politically distinct Polish groups are brought together to interact in a large studio where they make visual works that represent their political beliefs and platforms. What results is a gripping and sobering clash of ideologies that suggests that "creative" expression can obstruct constructive dialog or negotiation. Art, as we know, can be both a weapon for persuasion as well as for antagonism; it is not an autonomous activity exempt from social and ideological pressures.

The question of autonomy of art is a fitting segue to the bad and the ugly, that is to say, the issues raised by Documenta 12. This project would appear to be uneasily balanced on a tightrope that is readily traversed by most artists in negotiating the tension between aesthetic properties—"where art communicates itself and on its own terms—the aesthetic experience in its true sense," (curatorial preface in the exhibition catalog) and its 'situate-ness' or location in the world, with its particularities of context and history. This tension lends a measure of productive edge to the affair that is however undermined by curatorial idiosyncrasies and contradictions that steer the project into curious and puzzling cul-de-sacs. Their attempts to avoid the white-cube hermeticism for instance resulted in colored walls that brought uncomfortable associations with musty or overly precious decors of ethnographic or history museums or the large temporary Aue Pavilion that went on for tedious stretches without walls. Also, the withholding of information about artists' background on wall-labels was simply irritating and moreover condescending as if to suggest that the audience couldn't be trusted not to fixate on this information to the detriment of the esthetic experience. Another major curatorial conceit was to trace certain aesthetic trajectories by including earlier example of works such as a Persian carpet from the 1800s or an earlier watercolor of Chinese ceramic vases. The inclusion of these works seemed arbitrary and tokenistic, eliciting comparisons with the problematic Jean-Hubert Martin's 1989 *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition, critiqued for conflating art with craft and blurring the boundaries of contemporary art and traditional practices.

With Vienna based organizers—Roger M. Buergel as Artistic Director and Ruth Noack as Curator and George Schollhammer as Director of the Magazine Project—at the helm, I could not help but see the roots in their overall aesthetic choices in their fellow Austrian, architect, Adolf Loos' famous dictum that "ornament is a crime." Similar to U.S. puritan inclinations, the overall aesthetic manifest in publication and publicity designs can and have been summed up as austere, earnest (the most ubiquitous of the descriptions), and purposeful, a measured counter-aesthetic to the excesses and the frivolous associated with the current overheated, market-driven hoopla. They mostly delivered on their professed attempt to offer an alternative to the prevailing fanfare and to dispense with the usual cast of international artists, with a few exceptions: most notably, the hubristic James Coleman video installation that unnecessarily got the choice real estate in the Neue Galerie; or Allan Sekula's conceptually tepid billboard display about labor that littered the uphill trek towards the Herculeum and Ai Weiwei's *Fairytales*, a 'performance' in which 1001 Chinese, selected by the artist were invited to visit Kassel during the run of the show. Billed as the most expensive project in this Documenta (costing over 4 million Euros), it provocatively spins on its head a primary curatorial thematic about migration of forms and ideas with the literal migration of Chinese, 200 at a time who are put up in a refurbished warehouse that is visually reminiscent of a prison or a labor camp. This work interestingly begs a host of social and aesthetic questions such as whether these volunteers performance collaborators or are they migrant laborers paid in kind by the artist; can a week (the allotted time) in Kassel be a fairytale dream come true for any participant; what is the impact on residents? In an ironic contradiction to its name, "Fairytales" injected a measure of cosmopolitan problematic of migrancy and otherness to Documenta 12 and the city of Kassel, such that every East Asian visitor, like myself, become implicated—possibly mistaken to



be one of his 1001 Chinese subjects, which plays into the artist's hand. On the other hand, there was such a smattering of works from Asia in Documenta 12 that Ai's work, despite its merits, came across as a lavish window dressing in a store with empty shelves in the "Oriental" section. Asia has been always been a mere blip on the radar screen of Documenta, and alas, Documenta 12 did nothing to dispel this assessment.

The Documenta Magazine project was likewise riddled with controversy. On the one hand, it was a clever gambit to "deterritorialize" the project, seemingly a logical variation of Enwezor's "platforms" or conferences held in a number of far-flung sites in advance of the exhibition. While it was gratifying and edifying to see the many lesser-known journals given visibility, the projected gloss of democratizing openness and the possibility of exchange and interaction belied the scant evidence of the realization of these ideals. European critics such as Beat Weber and Kati Morawek make the point that this project can be likened to a corporate model in its "outsourcing of idea scouting," in which the project attains street 'cred' or in this case, global, cosmopolitan viability by cheaply procuring original ideas and research efforts of others.

While I have enumerated some shortcomings above, I have to reiterate in closing that the strengths of this exhibition outweigh its weaknesses. In the final analysis, I am appreciative of the sustained singular vision attempted by the project, that in the main, offers a refreshing alternative to the undifferentiated bricolage that characterizes so many of these international extravaganzas.



Sakarin Krue-On. Terraced Rice Field  
Art Project, Kassel. 2007. Luftaufnahme.  
Aerial Photo. Photo credits: Frank  
Schinski/documenta GmbH

## IN CONVERSATION

KATY DEEPWELL AND JUDY FREYA SIBAYAN

*Roger Buergel referenced as a key starting point for documenta 12, the question ‘where does art stand today, where do we stand today?’ which was asked by Arnold Bode in the 1955 Documenta. This discussion meant to address the same question with one important difference: the editors, Katy Deepwell, of n.paradoxa and Judy Freya Sibayan, of Ctrl+P, asked what difference does a consideration of gender have on Documenta. More pointedly, they asked questions about the position of women artists, feminist art theory/history and the perspectives of women in the organisation, agenda and reception of exhibitions like Documenta. This conversation took place in August 30, 2007 as part of the documenta 12 magazines Lunch Lecture Program held at the Documenta Halle in Kassel. Many editors of journals that participated in the documenta 12 magazines project, a journal of 97 journals, were invited to Kassel to take part in this lecture series.*

**Katy Deepwell:** First I want to say that we stole this title “Regendering Documenta” from a conference that took place earlier this year I believe in April in Vienna which was organized by Sabeth Buchmann. So I want to thank them for doing this conference which was a historical review of the history of Documenta and the representation of women within Documenta. We felt that it was important to bring that discussion into Documenta itself which is why we took the opportunity of having our lunchtime talk

Judy Freya Sibayan, editor of Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art and Katy Deepwell, editor of n.paradoxa in conversation. Image taken from [http://www.flickr.com/photo\\_zoom](http://www.flickr.com/photo_zoom).

as editors of magazines on this topic of Regendering Documenta. The university where it was, the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna has a long history related to this theme of gendering Documenta because it, for a long time, owned the Information Archive, developed by Ute Meta Bauer, Tina Geissler and Sandra Hastenteufel in 1992, which was a protest against the lack of women in Jan Hoet’s Documenta. This is why we chose this theme and we also want to pay tribute to the other women who have also questioned the politics of gender in Documenta.

**Judy Freya Sibayan:** You did the numbers. Please tell us about the peculiarities of these numbers. You found out for example that some women artists were invited several times, five times in fact.

**KD:** This chart is just a numerical headcount of the number of women artists rendered as percentages. If you want to see the detail of this, I’ve put them on display on the current magazine table to try to give you an indication of the numbers. However, I also want to point to the fact that statistics themselves are very deceptive. The figure here for Documenta 11 if you did it as a direct headcount you can actually end up with a percentage of thirty-nine percent which was the figure that I published. But this is counting every woman in every group. Another group did an analysis of Documenta 11 and came up with a figure of twenty-two percent women in this Documenta because they counted the number of works on display. So it depends on how you put together the statistics what kind of results you’re actually going to get.



**JFS:** But beyond Documenta for biennales like the Venice Biennale and all the other biennales, the number of women included average twenty percent so that the forty-six percent representation here in this current Documenta is rather rare.

**KD:** It's not exclusively rare. Rosa Martinez when she was the curator of Istanbul Biennale succeeded in organizing a biennale with sixty percent women. But generally this is unusual

**JFS:** But they average twenty, twenty-five percent?

**KD:** Yes, this is the figure from the current Venice Biennale curated by Robert Storr and in the Istanbul Biennale before Rosa Martinez, curated by Yuko Hasegawa. The average is twenty percent. But we have to put this into some historical context because in the 60s and the early 70s the percentage of women was less than generally ten percent. So this other group of figures from '72 to '97 was the critical norm of the time in major exhibitions. And Documenta had done nothing to challenge that norm. But in that norm, there's no relationship to the actual percentages of women artists working in Europe, America and the world which was closer to thirty-eight percent in the 90s.

**JFS:** Then it's another picture when it comes to the directorship of biennales. For Documenta, it's one is to eleven with Katherine David as the only woman director in 1997, one woman to eleven male directors. But beyond the principles of representational adequacy because this generates a certain kind of politics that is unachievable anyway—historically expositions aspire to have a universalist, humanist representation which is unachievable, perhaps we should talk about the ideological foundation of what Tony Bennett refers to as exhibitionary complex. Such a complex becomes a site of power and knowledge—knowledge because it aims to educate a populace, power because it is a permanent display of power. Perhaps this is the more problematic issue.

**KD:** We can frame this question in a number of different ways. I do want to say why we decided to stick with this notion of gender. We didn't call it we want to talk about women artists in Documenta or talk about feminism in Documenta. We called it "Regendering Documenta." I think it is worth rehearsing all the arguments about gender first. Because it is a very problematic term. There isn't just one gender. Often people talk about gender and they do want to treat it as synonym for feminism. They say, okay if you want to deal with gender politics then you'll have to deal with feminism. There are actually two genders or if you read Monique Wittig there are four genders, the homosexual and the lesbian count as another diversification of this picture of genders. I think there is a strong tradition, particularly amongst German feminist art historians, of dealing with gender studies as a comparison between masculinity and feminine.

**JFS:** And Documenta has a masculinist register. It's like the Olympics of all international shows.

**KD:** This particular Documenta is full of male to female comparisons. This morning I was by the Aue Pavilion and I was thinking about this brilliant pink work by Tanaka next to this incredibly pompous work by Ai WeiWei which fell over. So you have a collapsed masculinity next to this kind of vibrant femininity which is a historical reconstruction of a work from the 1950s. But throughout the exhibition there is plenty of material

Top: Tanaka Atsuko's 1955 *Tokyo Work*, made of a 1000 cm x1000 cm rayon material reconstructed for documenta 12. Bottom: Ai Wei Wei's *Template*. 2007. Both works installed at the Aue Pavilion grounds. Photo credits: Judy Freya Sibayan



like that. They're very strong male/female contrasts so it would be possible to do a kind of gendered analysis in terms of the comparisons of masculine and feminine in this exhibition. But the problem with this, and I think this is the problem of gender studies as a whole, is that you get this idea that somehow you can balance culture and you can balance life so you get complementary opposites always working together. But these figures show that we're already in a very unequal society and very unequal ratio.

**JFS:** And the analysis using binarism is also problematic.

**KD:** Yes. It doesn't shift anything necessarily. It seemingly disrupts certain perceptions, certain ideas. But you need a much deeper understanding to get past that and actually see other things at play.

**JFS:** You were talking about the women artists represented here in relation to the kind of history or rather the sources of the history of the works by women artists being shown here.

**KD:** It's more that I wanted to bring this particular Documenta into a comparison with two major feminist shows that happened in America. The first one happened in the Brooklyn Museum at the Elizabeth Sackler Center for Feminist Art. They bought Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party' and the 'Global Feminisms' was the first exhibition and it was designed to launch the Center itself. There were eighty-nine women in this exhibition from five continents around the world. But I have to say that none of the women who were in the Global Feminism show are actually in this current Documenta. However there is another show that happened on the west coast of America which is 'Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution' which was at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. This was a historical exhibition designed to show the roots of feminism in contemporary art concentrating very much on the period of 1960s to mid 1970s. And there is a very strong overlap between that show and Documenta in that about ten of the artists from the Wack! show are also in documenta 12. I think it is interesting that the same artists appear but unlike these shows which are polarized by on the one hand the historical view on the west coast and the contemporary view on the east coast, this show documenta 12 has put the works from the 70s or 60's in juxtaposition with contemporary works by the same women artists as those who were in the Wack! show so they don't appear isolated as historical figures. It's an attempt in a sense to keep feminism alive, perhaps in Documenta, by the inclusion of contemporary works by those who are still working. But there are also some very problematic examples of women artists. Lee Lozano for example. I'm amazed at how much interest and press coverage there has been of Lee Lozano of all the women artists in this show.

**JFS:** Yes. During my studies in the United States, I never studied her. She was never part of my readings so she comes as a surprise. Is the rewriting of history here recuperative?

**KD:** I think it is very problematic. The inclusion of two women artists who have been much reported on in the press but both of whom gave up making artwork. Lee Lozano gave up work because in the early 70s she decided to go on strike against the institution of art. But then she also made a strange decision in 1971 to boycott women and not to speak to women at all.

**JFS:** Was she a failure?

**KD:** No. But I think the protest which she established needs much more careful examination than just the display of her paintings again which are quite angry, even full of rage and which have been described by many as proto-feminist.

**JFS:** And were not actually canonized.

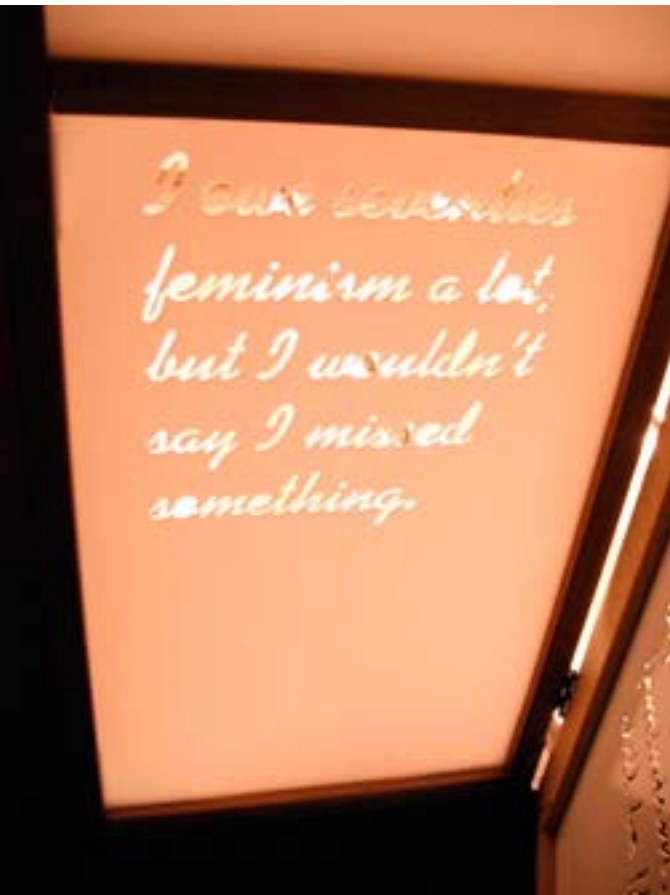
**KD:** Yes. And also Charlotte Posenenske in 1974 she decided not to work as an artist anymore and her interest shifted. I was thinking of how I could explain why this is so problematic. It is sometimes what I call the “Gwen John” syndrome. You have an artist who somehow manages to inspire an awful lot of interest from the public and amongst the women artists taken up by the culture industry are the ones who fail, who have some tragedy or failed to work, or stopped working. And the ones who work for forty, fifty, sixty years as artists and stay in the mainstream of professional life, who develop huge bodies of work, don’t inspire critical interest. It’s a kind of reversal of values.

**JFS:** So the failed projects are the ones being put out there as models.

**KD:** As models for what women artists should look at but the reality is that as we move through the 21st century, there are more and more and more women artists who have had thirty, forty, sixty year career as artists. More and more of them. The level at which they’ve had retrospectives, the opportunities the public have had to get to know and see and understand their work have become slightly larger. There’s more literature around. There are more retrospectives being organized. They’re included in shows like Documenta. So there is a greater attention to their work being given. But still the heroic failures are there as the models fostered by the mass culture industry.

**JFS:** We were talking about where women’s art is safe; if there is a space that is safe for women’s art and you found the word “safe” problematic because art that is rendered safe is art that is no longer critical. Do you think Documenta is a “safe” space for women’s art or is it a space for critical work?

**KD:** I think documenta 12 has worked very hard to problematize this security that somehow women’s art has happened; that women’s art is passé; that it has emerged, was done with and we can put it in the cupboard now. I think it is doing its best to problematize the position of women artists. May be we should dwell a little bit more on the press reception because it seems to me that many of the reviews that I read in English, particularly from the right wing press, that have not been complimentary about Documenta. For example there is a funny review in The Telegraph the title of which is “The Worst Art Show Ever.” I think there is a very powerful sexist assumption that has gone on with the measuring of the quality of the show and a negative review of the show which largely has to do with the volume of women artists within it.



Mary Kelly. *Love Songs*. Detail. 2005.  
Photo credits: Judy Freya Sibayan

**JFS:** But that’s a subtext. It’s really not out there being said particularly and definitely. It’s a subtext.

**KD:** If anything there has been an avoidance of the numbers of women artists here as an issue in the press. There’s an awful lot of press coverage. I was looking in the press office and any of you could go look in the press office and you could find how often on whether or not they even mention the volume of women artists as a factor in this exhibition as something to be noticed

**JFS:** Right. We were talking about how it has become a habit that one doesn’t even have to bother to see who’s making the art in terms of gender. Gender doesn’t factor into the problematics of the show.

**KD:** But then we have this very interesting question, which even Holland Cotter raised in the review in the New York Times which is when is somebody going to write a review of the history of art or a book on the history of art which gives equal representation to men and women artists together. That hasn't happened. I don't think it's likely to happen. It has been the reality of how the history itself has been lived. But what we've had throughout the course of the 20th century has been the endless privileging of male artists over female artists and their subsequent marginalization

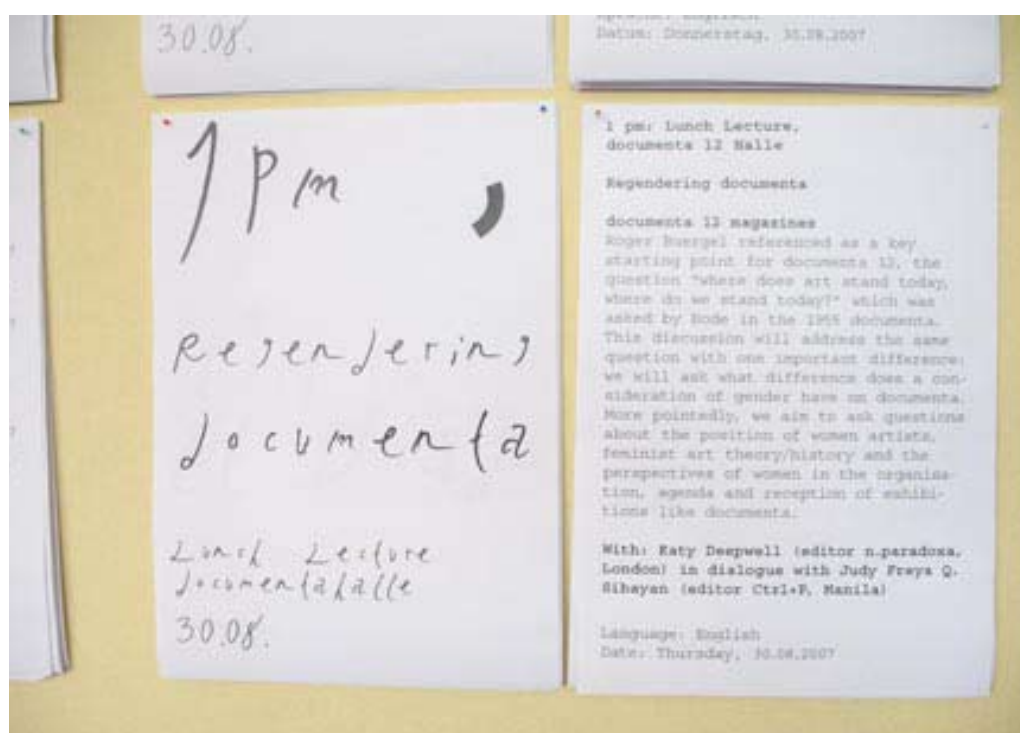
**JFS:** But I ask again, is representational adequacy achievable in shows like Documenta which aspire for universalist or humanist representation? Or should we look into other problems? For example the creation of audiences as docile bodies by exhibitions that demand one's humanness be left outside the exhibition space because one is expected to be only a disembodied spectator. It's only the eye that is being demanded to work in experiencing the exhibition.

**KD:** That's a good point. I am really amazed by the volume of women members of the audience walking around, large groups of women who have come in coach loads, and the many women who have come to see Documenta. Maybe there is some engagement between the majority of women audience and the works in this show. There has always been a negative presumption about organizing shows with large numbers of women that they will be badly critically received and very unpopular. But the reality is that when shows have been organized the reverse has been the case. They have been phenomenally successful and very popular maybe because the audiences have found a new vision, a new view of contemporary art.

**JFS:** A view that's hardly being put out there that engages the audience.

**KD:** Maybe it has to do with the different address to the senses. This show is very visual rather than tactile and we are encouraged almost to become disembodied eyes walking through the show.

**JFS:** But the audience is still a passive consumer of knowledge produced by experts. And these experts are hidden. One never sees those who produce this knowledge. And this knowledge is put out there for the audience to consume passively resulting in a monologic interaction which is not really an interaction.



Poster for Rgendering Documenta at the Documenta Halle.  
Photo credits: Judy Freya Sibayan

**KD:** I have to say this is the second time I've been to Kassel to see this show. There were things I missed the first time I walked around the show. I looked very hard the first time, I thought, and then I come back to the same room and there are completely different connections that I see again. This is the kind of show that you have to really sit and reflect and think about and think things through. There are many things that I absolutely did not connect and see and I think of myself as a quite educated viewer. I go to lot of exhibitions. But even then, I worry that there are many associations that people will not get or may be they will get a small portion of them and the bigger picture will be lost. It's certainly the case reading the critical reviews of the exhibition that you could actually map which venues or exhibits they visited. It's quite clear that some critics never got to some of the venues of Documenta. So they're not giving an overview. They're just giving an 'I saw this' kind of response.

**JFS:** Going back to the question of artists being included in such exhibitions like Documenta, I have fears that once included in such exhibitions, one's work gets co-opted and made instrumental in maintaining a certain kind of hegemony. My response to this is to create a work like the 'The Museum of Mental Objects,' a performance where I have rendered my body as the museum itself, a work where I have full control over my work.

**KD:** I have a slightly different take on this problem which we had some quite an extensive discussion about before in which I see every exhibition, every publication, every book, every journal—since we are heavily invested in making journals—as an articulation of ideas. This means with every new production, there's constantly new spaces for the re-articulation of ideas. There's constantly a way in which we can change the picture. This is also why I don't think feminism is over. I don't think that it's a dead project. There are still many questions to be addressed, many new articulations to be made which will not repeat the same story but see it afresh, see it differently.

**JFS:** Certainly we can expand the frame within which we can create art. And MoMO is a work that aims to do this. I made it into an institution because one can never be outside the institution of art. One can only expand the framework of this institution and see how one can engage more critically. Rather than always waiting for the system to take care of you, you can take care of yourself.

**KD:** Yes and I'd agree. And this is also why I started the whole project of n.paradoxa because I think the real failing is the lack of critical attention and serious critical discourse given to women artists. This is the real failure of our culture, to actually spend time looking at, writing about, thinking about, incorporating into our mental pictures, into our cultural memory the works of these women. This is the project of n.paradoxa. But there are also several other factors in here. We haven't really talked about the trans-national problem, trans-national discourses in contemporary art and how effective they are or not. More statistics? If you want more statistics we can give you more. We have plenty of these.

**JFS:** You were saying that the number of artists included in Documenta outside Europe aren't really that many so that it has been very Euro-centric in terms of numbers.

**KD:** Proportionately Documenta has been a very Euro-centric exhibition. Most critics acknowledge this. It has been very much about the history of Central European art. Coming from Britain, Britain has been very marginalized in the history of Documenta. We're used to it! We're on the fringes of Europe. (Iceland might say the same thing). For example Documenta 11 made such a great play at being trans-national and trans-generational but actually there were only three women artists who lived and worked outside Europe and America although if you considered ethnic or national origin this would be a different picture. Then you have another thing, you can play endlessly with statistics

because with statistics you can read them in different ways but there are still limits as to how you can read them. Interpretation does depend on where an artist is living and working. The pull of major metropolitan centers like New York, Berlin, London as the places where artists from all over the world will live is so huge that you have to be very careful when you're calculating statistics whether you're counting someone's birthplace as the reason for their national representation or whether you're counting the place where they're living and working and are part of the artistic milieu.



Hu Xiaoyuan. *A Keepsake I Cannot Give Away*. 2005. Photo credits: Judy Freya Sibayan

**JFS:** Yes, because there is now a Diaspora of artists. So you work in New York but you're from Beijing but you're always representing Beijing rather than New York.

**KD:** Yes and this is a common problem now because we do have such a trans-national flow of artists. But there is a flow to some major metropolitan centers and what we have less of is the old fashioned nationalist art historical discourse even though it's constantly being reinvented in new states all the time but we have less of this kind of the attempt to say, this is Chinese art in the 20th century, this is Peruvian art in the 20th century.

**JFS:** But the labels in documenta 12 don't attribute the artists' names to the countries they're from. We're just given a name and a description of the work. The work is there for us to directly experience and to directly reveal itself to us. Hardly any other mediating information is given.

**KD:** I think this is the problem for a lot of people who have little or no experience of art. It might open up a different kind of direct and lively encounter with the work. But there's also a possibility that the person will be left very hungry and unable to find any information to add to that picture.

**JFS:** Certainly, these kinds of events or exhibitions create two kinds of audiences—those who can see and those who cannot see. So we have those who can see who are the aesthetes and who know the history of pretty much what they're confronted with, and those

who have nothing. Thus a class of "see-ers" is created—those who can't see and those who can see the invisibles. And if museums and exhibitions of the scale of Documenta are here to educate then they have to create more "see-ers"

**KD:** Documenta's answer to this has always been the art mediation program and our discussion here is part of that process. In one sense we were co-opted whether we want it or not. Because one themes of this documenta is "Is antiquity our modernity?," there is also the possibility that you could actually have a formalist reading of the works because of this minimal style of presentation. Although the removal of countries was supposed to be about removing prejudices and supposedly disrupting the picture of modernity, it could end up having the opposite effect and reverting all readings to formalism in order to gain access to the work.

**JFS:** Which is a reliance on the self-sufficiency of forms.



**KD:** And a reliance entirely on visual clues within the work to actually inform you about what that work is about.

**JFS:** But works come out of contexts. They don't come out of a vacuum.

**KD:** And the risk of this is you might fail to change anything. You can have incredibly similar forms in two different continents invested in entirely different meanings. Even though I like it very much, you can see the Atsuko Tanaka experiments with numbers and diaries next to the Nasreen Mohamedi diary. But they're twenty years apart. It's a very interesting visual comparison but ultimately is it actually going to unlock the meaning in the work for the average audience or even for us?

**JFS:** And they might be read as one and the same thing.

**KD:** Or there were twenty years of visual experimentation which didn't amount to much.

**JFS:** What do you think the next Documenta is? Or is it valid to have a Documenta with all women artists?

**KD:** No, I think this would be entirely redundant and an over-reactive position. I don't think this will solve any of the problems of the representation of women artists.

**JFS:** So it's really not the numbers.

**KD:** It's not the numbers. My concern is much more about the story, what kind of stories are we being told. One of the things which may have escaped people's notice is that sixty percent of the women included are actually producing works pre 1999. And it's only forty percent of the works made after 2000 which are by women. So women are slightly smaller proportion of the contemporary works.

**JFS:** Will it matter if the director is a woman?

**KD:** I don't think it's a question of who that woman is, or who the man is. It's much more about their politics; what they want to realize in the exhibition and whether this will continue to set a framework, namely, whether Documenta will maintain its position as setting a framework for how the rest of the artworld will respond in the next five years. Documenta also has a very solid reputation of trying to avoid the more commercial aspects of contemporary art or the market-led and private commercial gallery-led artists. They generally don't appear in Documenta.

**JFS:** But are the artists auto-critical?

**KD:** There have been plenty of artists who have done institutional critiques in Documenta.

**JFS:** And Documenta itself?

**KD:** I think this exhibition if anything is the most auto-critical about the history of what Documenta has been. Even Szeemann in 1972, his proposition was, this was to offer a new look at contemporary art, and be an agenda setting exhibition. Catherine David's purpose was to put art after 1945 again on the map and do a rereading of that historical position and set contemporary artists against that. This exhibition also looks at what the history of art after 1950 has been but it has picked some quite marginal figures to reposition contemporary art against other trends and other currents in modernity.

**JFS:** But is it ever auto-critical in terms of its alignment to power or its being a site of power? Or it cannot help itself be that because the whole exercise is the display of power in fact?

**KD:** I think again it depends on your view like how ultimately you're going to see Documenta. Are you going to see it as something that is fixed? Or are you going to see it as an articulation of something that happened at a particular time? How much faith are you going to put in that as the "law"? Or are you going to see it as just a particular articulation of something. Knowing this, if you took a different trajectory or a different approach and you rearticulated this knowledge in a different way or you had a more critical view, you'd see it as a much more fluid construction perhaps even much more ad hoc and worked out by chance. I would see it as imposing an order, but it is a strong suggestion.

**JFS:** In other words it has the ability to reinvent itself depending on who is directing it. And that it is not a monolith.

**KD:** The danger is that we think these things are fixed. For example, some feminists in the 1970s treated the museum as a redundant institution and as fixed.

**JFS:** Thus it was best to leave it alone and not deal with it.

**KD:** Yes, leave it alone don't deal with it. Move away as the status quo is rigged against you. While other feminists—notably art historians—went to the basement, rediscovered all these women artists, put them all on the walls of the museum and challenged the way we think of art and art history and transformed that understanding simultaneously with the feminists who were working outside the museum. So I think what we have to do is see it as an endless struggle over meaning and meaning-production and not see it as this is how it is.

**JFS:** And this need not necessarily be an oppositional meaning-making but an engaged kind of meaning-production because after all the museum is a critical site for cultural production. But one need not think that the museum has all the power.

**KD:** Yes, yes, you have the power. I mean here we are. We two are sitting here and in different ways we founded our own little institutions to contest this power. We don't see it as something we don't have control over or cannot intervene in.

**JFS:** But there's this question about working at the margins as a site where one has no power. And if one were to accept this as true then indeed being at the margins is problematic. I however have chosen to work at the margins, and dialog with the center and sometimes I am in the center and often, I have created myself as the center.

Top: n.paradoxa and statistics on women's art and Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art exhibited as part of the documenta 12 magazines project at the Documenta Halle.

Photo credits: Judy Freya Sibayan



And this is my response to having to work with the center of institutions. But I do not consider myself outside the institution. I am part and parcel of the institution art and the institutionalizing of art.

**KD:** Yes and I'd say that very much about my editorial work. I mean I see my books and the journals that I produce as interventions in the establishments of certain forms of knowledge. They challenge how knowledge itself is being constructed. I don't believe that knowledge itself as fixed and done. It's constantly being reinvented. In publishing a large number of women—about 170 women artists, critics and curators from 40 countries in the last ten years, I hope, I've provided a space for some other approaches to how people could think about contemporary art in the present.

**JFS:** Or how one can create meanings in other sites.

**KD:** Yes. And a visibility to different feminist interventions or practices which will allow us to think differently about the course of contemporary art.

**JFS:** Is there anything else you want to talk about or shall we open the floor to the audience?

**Ruth Noack:** Let me thank you again for initiating this conversation. I think it is very important to have it here. There are two comments I'd like to make. One, you talked about creating a class of see-ers. You were talking about the audience who can't see and who can see. I do have a different position on this than you seem to have because you said the audience who can see are the experts and the audience who can't see are the lay people who don't have so much. I would turn this around because from what I

can see from what has happened in this Documenta, it's quite interesting that this has been changed around at least this is what I seem to be getting from a lot of the conversations I have with the public because I have conversations almost everyday with the public. And that is, interestingly enough, the experts have not been able to see because they have not been able to deal with the fact that a lot of the categories have been turned around and a lot of people have left and written about this. They say 'there's nothing to see, because there's not quality of work, there's not quality of the curating, it's a not interesting show, it's unprofessional.' All about not finding what they were looking for. Whereas interestingly enough it turns out that a high percentage of the audience is actually people who are buying evening tickets or tickets for more than one visit. They come a lot. A lot of first timers, a lot come from Kassel much more than before. And this is also what we wanted. They come to re-see and they are actually asking extremely precise questions, questions that I would have expected from professionals but have not come from professionals both on the works as on the curating itself. But not always positive. A lot of critique but very

informed critiques. That's the other thing. The experts are not arguing. And I find this is really really interesting because I think that often as experts we think that people are much less able to be agents but if you actually open the space for the public to be active, they will take it upon themselves to educate themselves in the process of seeing. And I think this is not about formalism. They're also getting a lot of background information because once you want the background information, it's out there and you can get it.



Ruth Noack, Curator of documenta 12 during the open forum of Regendering Documenta Lunch Lecture.  
Photo credits: Keiko Sei

And the other thing, I have a different position on Posenenske but I would completely agree with you on Lee Lozano. But I think Posenenske did not fail. I think it was really an important decision to stop working in the medium of visual arts and to start becoming a political activist and sociologist. Her step to leave the production of objects was not one that was about giving up but it was actually about changing the medium into another kind of politics that I think was extremely important. I would compare her to another person in this show, Jorge Oteiza who did the same thing. He became engaged in politics and decided at a certain time in the 70s that the visual media was not a way to change society. I think this is an important step. And I would not separate their biography into the worthwhile part—producing visual art and the failure doing political activism. But I would actually see them as two sides of the coin.

**Judy Freya Sibayan:** I think what I meant about creating see-ers and non-see-ers is that this is a standard project of art institutions to prepare the audience in terms of the context of the artwork, the biography of the artist and so on and these are learned so that when the audience confronts the work it is far richer than just its formal physicality. The density of the work in terms of the meaning being created does not sit only on the level of the physicality of the work but you see it within a larger context whether historical, sociological or political.

**Katy Deepwell:** I hope I have said enough sceptical things. As a critic, I didn't say that I saw and understood everything. I said I had to come back. And this is a show that takes a long time to absorb. It doesn't have this spectacle or what is often called YBA approach, a kind of one liner, five second, I get it and walk away. A lot of the work is not at that level. You really need to spend time with it and think about it and reflect on it. I am not making the presumption that any member of the public will not see. I think the intelligent response is welcome from the members of public precisely because a lot of my comments I have just made are about the failure of critics to actually notice things and report not on their failures but on their condemnation for what they cannot see.

The same goes for my comments on Charlotte Posenenske. I don't have a particular axe to grind about her. It seems to me these were the two artists who were most frequently mentioned in the press as the examples of women artists. Apart from the critique of the Daily Telegraph on Mary Kelly which was very misplaced and wrong, factually wrong, and on Martha Rosler, there were actually very few who were regularly noticed. And if you go and look at this press display, what is also kind of interesting is that although we've put these percentages up of the gross of women artists in Documenta, I also put a little chart which has a list of about twenty-five women who have been in more than two of Documentas. And there are a large number of women who have been repeatedly called on to be in Documentas. I think Joan Jonas has the record. I think she has been on four or five. Hanna Darboven is a pretty close second. It's like there is no plurality in our cultural imagination for the range of women artists that have existed and have made work. But compared to the range of works that are produced by male artists, the production of women artists has been constantly circumscribed. It's either this or that. It's either political or it's non-political. Meaning closed.

**Keiko Sei:** You were talking about a certain notion of the spectacle of biography, that if an artist's biography becomes more important, there is a better chance that this woman artist will be included in international exhibitions?

**Katy Deepwell:** No, it's just that there has been a kind of fascination with the autobiographical problems of individual women in the ways in which certain women artists have been received. And it has been on that level of engagement, an engagement with personality and not a critical examination of the work.

**Keti Chukhrov:** I have just a small commentary. The difficulty in reading the exhibition has more to do with the gaps between the work and the motivation of connection

between them than by the works themselves. I think that the motivation to connect the works is so much overworked and so heavily motivated and so personally loaded that it makes it difficult to read.

**Katy Deepwell:** This is why we were critical about the amounts of information that were actually given because it's very hard to put together a mental picture of the dates, the places where artists have been working and the kinds of production that they have had. And then there's another difficulty of the whole exhibition. Often the works by the same artists are very widely dispersed in the exhibition. So you can find one tiny piece by someone and then you walk to another venue and you find another piece by them. So you won't necessarily connect the trajectory of those works over twenty, thirty years by the same artist. It takes a lot of thought to do that. You might have a particular interest in one artist and you will make that effort or a particular interest in a certain practice so you will make those connections but a lot of people don't spend that much time and energy on an exhibition. The standard time that people spend visually focusing on works in large exhibitions or galleries is less than ninety seconds on each work. A lot of curators now accommodate this. They expect this. That is why they're very interested in spectacular displays which will hold people's attention for that kind of time. How many of us in the audience spent twenty, forty, sixty minutes watching a whole video in its entirety? The ones that actually last two and a half minutes, they're very comfortable. We actually get through two and a half minutes. We don't actually spend twenty, forty, sixty minutes in the same space reading the work. I have gone back to some works which interested me and have spent that time on some of them. But I can't say that I have actually spent that time on every work on the same show for the length of time it was running.

**Judy Freya Sibayan:** I think even the problem of figuring out why all these works come together or what were the decisions made why these works are together or not together in terms of the different venues is quite difficult to grasp not unless you read the curator's or director's vision of the exhibition. And I don't think an audience does this—to figure out what is the vision of this enterprise.

**A member of the audience:** I have a question for you Katy. Did I understand it right that you said sixty percent of the women artists are historical here and forty percent are contemporary? And I thought that in most exhibitions where women now are represented, they are mostly the young ones, always fresh, fleshed so to say. And I found it here very intelligent to put together, to show that also women artists have a history and also individuals like Lili Dujourie or others that they produce works in different times and different works and you can search these in the different venues and I found I can find my own past to go through and to find out things which I never knew about. Kolarova for me is a brilliant example. I always knew her husband Jiri Kolar. We had in Germany lots of exhibitions by him and now in this Documenta, I find there is something totally different. So I would like to know what you think of this question.

**Katy Deepwell:** This is why I tried to introduce very briefly this comparison with 'Global Feminisms' because 'Global Feminisms' the criteria for that show was only artists born after 1960. So every artist in that show, all eighty-nine, are less than forty-seven years old. And you're right. There is this very strong tendency to show groups of young artists together both male and female and not to show the contemporary work of women artists who have been working for twenty or thirty years or not to link that work. There is another historical precedent in terms of this show for the kind of presentation chosen which is Catherine de Zegher's very influential exhibition 'Inside the Visible' which also attempted to do that—show a historical overview of individual women. So there have been precedents for doing it. Yes, it is very rewarding and is very nice to actually see how someone's work changes over several decades. It also overcomes this problem of feminism being identified with only the 1970s as a historical period and somehow feminist art had its moment and it's over and it's a movement that has passed and was not part of the present.

**A member of the audience:** I was just thinking about what you thought about the whole project of not only looking at feminist history which is a definite intention in this show but also gendering art history itself and rereading a lot of modernists because if you look at Nasreen, Tanaka, Mira Schendel, Agnes Martin you are getting a gendered history of modernism also. How do you read this because I think these are slightly two different strands that come together.

**Katy Deepwell:** I think there are plenty of other people that could have been picked to show a gendered history of modernism in the twentieth century (gendered in terms of male/female comparisons). You could get into interesting arguments about whether or not this artist should have been in as opposed to another artist I think this strong overlap with Wack! at Los Angeles MOCA is interesting because the very controversial work that is on the front cover of the catalogue for Wack! is actually on display in the Castle which is Martha Rosler's 'Body Beautiful' which is a collage of hundreds of naked women arranged like a huge harem and is about the excesses of the cosmetics industry. This sits very nicely against Lili Dujourie's early paper collages in the same room. So there are interesting connections there. But again they're quite formal connections. There are plenty of other collages, photo collages in this show as a whole from Grete Stern in 1954 or CK Rajan from India. Would you say that the theme of Documenta that has emerged is the study of collage? And if you wanted to say that was the theme that was emerging through the juxtapositions, would these have been the artists that you would choose to illustrate the argument? So there would be other ways to interpret the themes that have emerged. It doesn't have to be just by gender.

**A member of the audience:** I only have a statement. I was here sometimes with groups and there were always women in the groups. There were more women than men as in most exhibitions. And they were so relaxed. And I had the feeling, oh! here is an exhibition where I can go through relaxed. Because I happen to look who is that, who is that and I have the feeling here both sexes are represented and there were more different views. This relaxed feeling, I don't know if others have the same experience but this I wanted to tell.

Long lines in front of the Museum Fridericianum. Detail of Sanja Ivekovic's *Poppy Field*, 2007, and Andrea Siekmann's *The Exclusive. On the Politics of the Excluded Fourth*, 2007 at the Friedrichsplatz. Photo credits: Judy Freya Sibayan



# Optimism and the Politics of Site: The 10th Istanbul Biennial

GINA FAIRLEY

On the eve of the 10th Istanbul Biennial, Turkey elected a new President, Abdullah Gul, the first Islamist to take the office in this secular, but predominantly Muslim, country. Turkey sits at the fold between spiralling conflict in neighbouring Middle East and the ‘increasingly imperious’ European Union to the West.<sup>1</sup> While a contemporary topic, this difference is not a new phenomenon for Turkey. Istanbul has long provided a picture of the past charged with the rawness of its transformation. My immediate reaction was, ‘the Manila of Europe’.

Such a ‘site’ cannot exist outside political implication; and a biennial that makes its core the city and its global parallels, undoubtedly, carries a political tone. With few surprises then, Hou Hanru’s exhibition, *Not only Possible but also Necessary: Optimism in the Age of Global War* begs the question, how does a curator remain outside the danger of staged dialogues? Writer Matthew Schum agrees, “Finding optimism for our global era ultimately will be less pressing than seeing how this biennial manages to stay fresh?”<sup>2</sup>



Nina Fischer and Maroan El Sani. *Xoo – ex ovo omnia*. 2006. Two channel projection (video still). Installation view AKM. Photo credits: Gina Fairley

Chinese-born Paris-based, Hanru is the second Asian curator invited to Istanbul.<sup>3</sup> Established in 1987, it is among the coterie of biennales established prior to the 1990s explosion and could be described as a bi-product of Turkey’s Republican expansion. With its starting point focussed on Turkey’s modernization and its current manifestation surrounded by ‘global gentrification,’ these notions sit as bookends to the Biennial’s two-decade history. So armed with twenty-first century disillusionment and art-world-cynicism, how does one navigate Hanru’s Global War Optimism?

## **Narrative as navigator**

Much was said of this exhibition not being thematic and yet Hou Hanru’s wordy — shall we call it ‘umbrella thought’ then — was adopted late in the piece to unify his



Atatürk Cultural Centre, Taksim  
Venue for 10th Istanbul Biennial  
“Burn it or Not?” Photo credits:  
Gina Fairley

### Architecture as Site

Atatürk Cultural Centre (AKM) is the jewel of this biennial. Constructed in the early 1970s in an archetypal-modernist style, it is currently under threat of demolition in the face of capitalist expansion. Hanru employs the title, “Burn It or Not?,” alluding to the buildings destruction by fire the year following its opening. He questions ‘should it again be razed?’ citing 15 artists as the mouthpiece to raise local awareness of the buildings fate and the privatisation of public spaces globally. Belgium artist Els Opsomer’s responded most literally to Hanru’s site-specific invitation with a reading-booth documenting the building’s history.

Curatorially, the AKM works connect implicitly with the site. Take Daniel Faust’s photographic series, *UN (United Nations) 2006-07* at home with the original furniture of AKM, they draw a parallel between Le Corbusier’s New York masterpiece and AKM, not only aesthetically, but through their contemporary failures and veneer for continuing optimism. Similarly, film-maker Aleksander Komarov links AKMs glass

exhibition. Was it just a marketing hook to draw curators with ballsy buzz, snaring the competitive edge from the Inaugural Athens Biennale that opened the same week? Or is there a more fundamental need to hang contemporary art on a framework of carefully articulated ‘probes’ in our increasingly conservative world?

Fundamentally, Hanru’s exhibition falls down in its ability to create that sense of ‘freshness.’ One just has to pick up the 9th Istanbul Biennial reader and flip to the first line of the first essay, “Hope is tied to the passions that make up our everyday reflections on the world, and to our political activities.”<sup>14</sup> Is Hanru merely supplying the next chapter?

Perhaps to invert this familiarity with a topic already trialled, Hanru applies venue mini-themes in what he describes as “factories for ideas.” He uses three primary sites: Atatürk Cultural Centre at centrally located Taksim Square; the Istanbul Textile Traders’ Market, and Antrepo No. 3—a dockside venue in the contemporary art zone of Tophane. Additionally, smaller projects are scattered across the city at the new university site of SantralIstanbul; KAHAM on the Asian side and guerilla-style projections with the “Nightcomers” project.

How successful were these sites? Opinions varied but generally visitors were left with a flighty oscillation between connection and disconnection, which amounted over the breadth of this huge exhibition as lacking a coherent backbone.

Aleksander Komarov. *On Translation; Transparency / Architecture Acoustique.* 2007. Video installation; HD 3’ x 10’55”  
Installation view AKM, Photo credits:  
Gina Fairley



façade as the symbol of modern elegance and ‘new world’ institutional transparency with the Bundestag Berlin and Van Nelle Factory in Rotterdam. He reminds us we can watch government working in the Reichstag Berlin live as a tourist attraction. Has transparency itself become spectacle or is it just the illusion of transparency? We only have to remember the embedded journalism of the Iraq invasion to confirm our doubts. While lacking the splash of more spectacular installations, Komarov’s film is particularly pertinent for this Biennial with the recent elections and era of corporate responsibility.



Some believed AKM's strong architectural elements overwhelm the individual artworks. "One can feel a tension as the building stubbornly refuses to recede into the background and the retrograde interiors come back to life," suggests Schum.<sup>5</sup> The counter argument is, Hanru overcame the impossibilities of curating such an overtly aestheticised space by playing off visual dialogues and connections, using these tensions. For example, the reflective tile walls echo the water in Vahram Aghasayan's photographs displayed against them, or the building's stairs function as an amphitheatre for viewing projections. Sensitivity and opportunity override the sites aesthetic pitfalls as a 'white cube.'

For this writer, more problematic is the inclusion of big-name artists for that very reason, such as Xu Zhen's self-indulgent Everest installation, *848-1.86* (2005), which had no connection to the site, other works or Hanru's theme. Strewn like a hiking shop clearance sale, it appeared unresolved and amateurish against the modern clarity of AKM.

Top: Huang Yong Ping's minaret missile 2007. Installation view Antrepo No. 3.  
Bottom: AES+F's *Last Riot-Last Riot 2*. 2005-07. Detail. Digital photography on canvas. Installation view Antrepo No. 3  
Photo credits: Gina Fairley



While focussing heavily on AKM, it makes for the most interesting venue in the Biennial as it challenges curatorial models and site-specificity. The 'unforgiving nature of the building' blatantly reveals the exhibitions flaws and yet there's an optimism in facing those challenges with honesty and consistent curatorial enquiry.

### Factory Flop

The Istanbul Textile Traders' Market, in contrast, failed terribly. Using a theme with great potential, "World Factory," the works did little more than use the 'shops' as display zones, rather than engaging the site's tangibility. A greater failing of this project is that Hanru 'tested' it earlier in San Francisco.

Described as a 'masterpiece of Turkish modernist architecture' from the 1950s, it references traditional bazaars and internationalism. Corraling 20 artists under the lip-service of inequality, the projects drew attention to the developing world's role in providing consumer needs for the first world, exposing sweatshops, abused labour-forces and environmental disregard. However, the projects become lost in their density of documentation; visitors burnt out by video-blur, the projects too widely spread over the six-building site, diluting visitor engagement. This is where Phil-American, Lordy Rodriguez's work was shown, *The Sugarland Effect* (2007). It maps outsourced labour against America's fortune 500 companies, but like many works at IMC potentially poignant, it fell flat. The literal connections that worked at AKM, become too dense with information to pull off IMC.

Hou Hanru chose two concepts to define Antrepo No. 3: "Entre-polis" and "Dream House" further fracturing the exhibition. The viewer is reliant on obvious political connections rather than the meter of revelation or curiosity, any subtly snuffed by bold one-liners such as Harma Abbas karma sutra warriors and Huang Yong Ping's minaret missile. Sit them in the same zone with sensational works like AES+F's digital kiddie war-scape, *Last Riot* (a version was shown at Venice), Michael Rakowitz's installation of looted antiquities from the National Museum of Iraq made from

Notes:

1. Matthew Schum; haudenschild Garage, 2007
2. Ibid.
3. The first Japan's Yuko Hasegawa in 2001
4. Mary Zournazi, "Hope, Passion, Politics", 9th Istanbul Biennial Reader 2003, p. 51.
5. Schum; ibid
6. Pelin Tan, 10th Istanbul Biennial catalogue essay, p. 130.

The 10th Istanbul Biennale was held September 8 to November 4, 2007. It was organized by the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Art. [www.iksv.org](http://www.iksv.org)

Hou Hanru is a Paris-San Francisco based critic and curator, born in China 1963. He is currently Director of Exhibitions and Public Programs at San Francisco Art Institute. He has curated over 50 exhibitions and biennales including "Beyond", the 2nd Guangzhou Triennale (China 2005), "Go Inside" the 3rd Tirana Biennale (Albania 2005) and co-curated "Zone of Urgency", 50th Venice Biennale (2003), "Pause" the 4th Gwangju Biennale (Korea 2002) and the Shanghai Biennale (2000). He is an Advisory Committee member of De Appel Foundation Amsterdam and the Walker Art Centre, USA.

Right: Vahram Aghasyan. *Ghost City*. 2005. C-print. 100 x 130 cm. Installation view AKM.  
 Below: Lordy Rodriguez. *The Sugarland Effect*. 2007. Ink on paper, map pins, yarn. Dimensions variable  
 Installation view IMC. Photo credits: Gina Fairley

Middle Eastern food-packaging, and David Ter-Organyan's domestic bombs, and little is left to the imagination. We are left with formulaic contemporary works playing out prescribed geo-political and religious tensions. Optimism is used as a pawn for sensationalism.

Of the 50 artists shown at this venue, it's the quieter works and subtle connections that present a more thoughtful consideration of Hanru's theme such as Wong Hoy Cheong's video installation *Oh Sulukule, Darling Sulukule*, made by children from Istanbul's gypsy community or Allora & Calzadilla's beautiful film of a man using the air from his bicycle tire to fill his tulum, a folk wind instrument; his journey through the city illuminating the different speeds of traditional and contemporary urban life.

### Creating New Orders

How successful was Hou Hanru's Biennial in steering viewers beyond the pitfalls of rhetoric, bringing local and global together through site-specificity? Istanbul carries its past on the sleeve of its modernization. The maturity of Istanbul's contemporary art scene that has flourished with the sustained dialogue of its Biennial, is perhaps the greatest indication of an optimistic future. It embraces the new within the old and, from that perspective, remains honest.

Writer Pelin Tan offers the observation, "...without history, there can be no tangible measure of the 'new' and its emphatic prowess."<sup>6</sup> Hanru's gives us the next instalment of the 'new' — it may be prescriptive, for some optimistic, but more implicitly, it maintains contemporary art as the catalyst for change in this ancient city.



FLUDETTE MAY V. DATUIN

In organizing this year's *Tampo Lapuk* ("tampo" means to contribute, and "lapuk" means clay or mud in Cebuano, a major language in the Visayas, Central Philippines) an exhibition for the 2nd Dumaguete Terracotta Biennial, Riel Jamarillo Hilario "sought to foreground the relevance of art to its immediate public." As curator, he says, "my problem was to find patterns, connections that can be congruent and accessible to the public—the students of Foundation University in particular—whom I intend to address." He thought he "found the answer in the memorabilia collection of Museo Vicente," named after Vicente Sinco, founder of the school where the museum is located, and which incidentally, was then celebrating its foundation day. "In several museums curators have tried to 're-energize' their collection of artifacts and objects with exhibitions merging them with contemporary art," according to Hilario. "This was a strategy to rouse interest

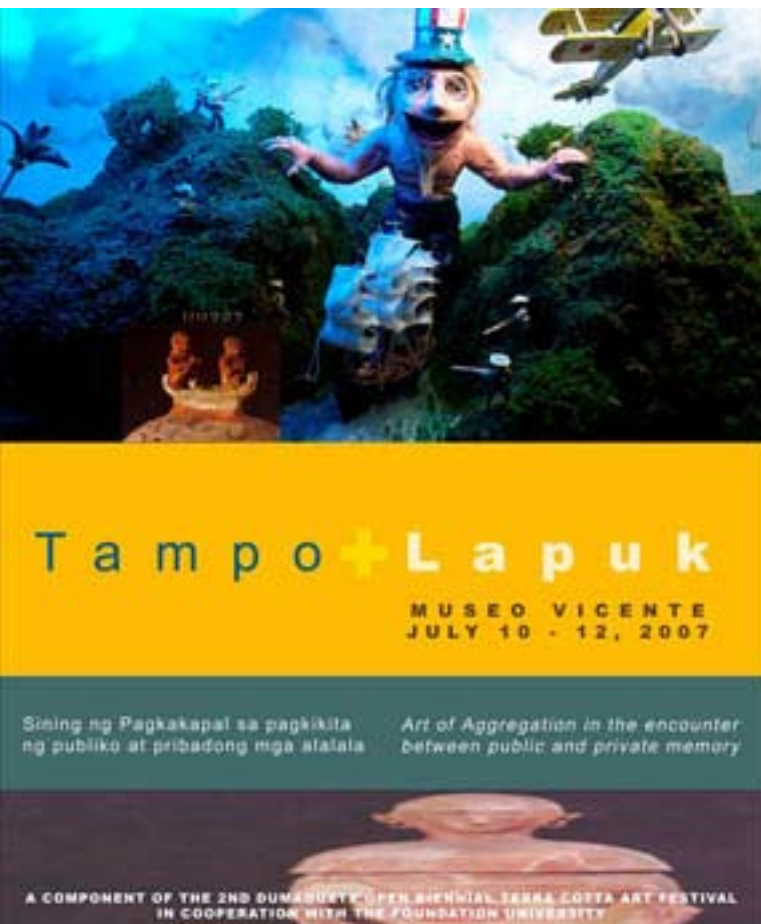
for the collection and to direct attention to the needs of conservation and preservation of cultural objects. In other words, it was a strategy to facilitate care for cultural objects and for heritage in general."

Drawing from the modeling and molding of terracotta as process, metaphor and theme, Hilario subtitled the show "Art of Aggregation in the Encounter between Private and Public Memory," where "aggregation" refers to the additive and accumulative process of *pagkakapal*, which literally means to add or thicken in Tagalog (the Philippine lingua franca), and *paglilingkis*, which refers to the process of merging separate parts into one integrated mass. In this show, artworks by contemporary artists were to be added and integrated into the house-turned-museum cum Dean's Office. But when we walked into the uncomfortable interiors (largely because the air conditioner was off) of Museo Vicente one very humid, slightly rainy afternoon in July, there were signs—some very faint but others very telling—that place, artworks and artifacts did not connect and integrate; instead, they were reciting their own monologues, at times "tangentially" (Hilario's word) and incidentally referring to each other, and at other times, not dialoguing at all.

This gap is most evident in Pamela Yan's installation, which appropriated one of the furniture on which the artist "sat" two paintings of children in a way that made them appear to be conversing with each other. In front of this set-up, was a low companion table, on top of which was a small glass case containing cow-shaped cut-outs. From the curatorial

notes we learn that this piece was meant to be interactive and that viewers were supposed to play a game in pairs; one player was supposed to draw one paper cow at a time, and flash the side where a text is written to his/her partner, who then must reply or react according to the context of the word or phrase. The players switch roles after the set is completed. Not having read the curator's instruction, and having no space or chair to sit on, I picked up the paper cows, but did not have a clue as to what to do with them, nor what they were about. It turned out that "Yan created the work as a reflection of her son's lessons on the niceties of conversation. But it can also refer to the difficulties of dialogue and exchange, which is mediated by the formality and ritual of words. Communication becomes a public ritual and spontaneous expression is filtered and regimented."

On one level, this piece is suggestive of the ways by which conversations in lived spaces can easily lose their spontaneity the moment they are "regimented" in the public



Tampo Lapuk was held in Museo Vicente, July 10-12, 2007, Dumaguete City, Philippines, an exhibition for the 2nd Dumaguete Terracotta Biennial, July 8-30, 2007

sphere of language and display. But on another level, it is a very clear and concrete index of the cracks in whole show, fired as it was in the furnace of mistranslations, miscommunications and curation/creation under duress. During ingress, handshake agreements forged a few months ago, quickly gave way to last minute changes and last minute problems ranging from the mundane—food and lodging for artists who sourced their own airfares—to those that indicate the gaps between curatorial vision and realization. While Hilario was understandably anxious about the conservation and preservation of the objects as carriers of “cultural heritage,” the Dean’s secretary—most likely echoing the sentiment of her employers, the heirs of Vicente Sinco—was more concerned about the possibility of the students’ touching and destroying the termite-ridden “santos” of Leroy New’s installation. What do we make of the hosts’ apparently more overriding concern for “security” rather than the curatorial “ruse” to re-energize and arouse interest for a collection in disarray and decomposition?

Neil Cummings, in his essay in *Art and Design*’s issue on “Curating (No. 52, 997),” intimates that the journey of objects from lived space to museum is a troubled one. In the everyday, every thing can be any thing—as souvenir, as art and as rubbish—simultaneously or alternately or cyclically; in the museum, everything is contained and made to obey a prescribed set of institutional rules and agenda. In the backwaters of Dumaguete, where the discipline of museology is still at its infant stage, if it exists at all, this shift from the domestic to the institutional frame is fraught enough, as seen in the chaos and state of dis(re)pair the artists found themselves in when they communed with the space for the first time. And by seeking to transform this space into a contemporary art venue, albeit for a few days, curator and artists have added another layer of promise and peril to an already charged and fissured biennial terrain.

Known for their conceptual and process-oriented edge, artists and curator could have negotiated this promise and peril more productively had they done their homework, which come to think of it, is mandatory—not just for these young artists who have hopefully emerged wiser and steeled after their baptism of fire—but for all us, every time we leave for another town, even and especially, if that town is very much closer to home. I found it ironic for instance that most of these artists are graduates of the University of the Philippines, the country’s premier state university once headed by Sinco. But they knew next to nothing about the man and his memorabilia, so much so that they can only tangentially refer to him in their “readymade” artworks. Marina Cruz’s installation for instance, tangentially refers to Sinco’s exemplary work as educator. In a more “neutral” and less-charged space however, it is a very strong and complex stand-alone tribute to the artist’s aunt (her mother’s twin), one of the unsung heroes of education, whose work is felt and remembered, not through monuments and memorabilia, but at the ground level of the everyday.

Rodel Tapaya’s diorama of his version of the legend of Bernardo Carpio, the Filipino giant king incarcerated in the mountains by foreign invaders, could be a rallying symbol of nationalism. In the specific secluded space of the artist’s recreated library, the diorama becomes a reflection on Sinco’s patriotism.

Tatong Torres recreates an altar, at the center of which is a charcoal on canvas drawing of an imaginary totemic figure. In front of this rabbit-like “heroic portrait,” he installs candles, which, according to the curatorial notes, are meant to lead us to the rest of the museum collection and its traces of “the actual man and not the petrified symbols that represent him.”

In the other works, we discern the artists’ attempts to reference the space itself, and the journey of its objects from the fluid, often “messy” sphere of the everyday to the public sphere of museological classification, collection and display. Cris Villanueva Jr.’s *trompe l’oeil* bubble wrap on fake chinaware propped on plate stands and encased in vitrines from the museum “mimics the way such items are classified, studied and exchanged,” writes Hilario. While the installation tangentially reflects the collection of stoneware and other objects of the Museo Vicente, it can also be a “veiled allusion to the Chinese ware trade of the 10th to 16th centuries which unfortunately competed

advantageously with the local terracotta industry, especially in Tanjay and Bais.” Hersely Ven Casero, the lone participant from Dumaguete, moved into the dining room, and arranged his works on the dining table, in a way that alludes to family gatherings, “thus tangentially referring to the original context of the museum as a house.”

All these tangential references and “aggregates” to place and man, while novel and refreshing at first glance, became tedious and forced after a while. The artists’ “readymades” overshadowed their host, with its interiors serving as backdrop and prop. Cruz brought with her a painting, a sculpture and a video work, which she installed with chairs from the museum to approximate one of her aunt’s classroom set-ups. Costantino Zicarelli, a Kuwait-born, Filipino-Italian artist brought his accumulated drawings on postcard-sized boards and collages and displayed them in the museum’s unused and broken glass displays. And on a wall near Cruz’s installation is Leeroy New’s glossy, garishly-colored interpretations of the sacred heart and the all-seeing eye, made out of fiberglass and urethane, which he juxtaposed with the brittle, insect-ridden “santos” or religious icons he “rescued” from the bowels of the museum.

Had the artists worked *from* the found objects and found space and not *onto* it, they could have drawn more attention, as Hilario intended, to the collection, rather than the other way around. Where, why and how did Sinco acquire the artifacts, such as the termite-ridden saints and the unused glass cases of New’s and Zicarelli’s pieces? Were they souvenirs from Sinco’s travels? Or were they gifts? Are they local? Why were the saints allowed to rot? How can an object transform from a valued religious icon to a *santo* in distress? But since the space was only tangentially referred to, our attention was focused less on these questions than on the artists’ thematic and formal agenda—that of highlighting the contrast between old and new, but mostly to echo the sentiment of the younger generation as they strive to inject a new iconography to old religious forms, in the case of New; and that of Zicarelli’s confrontational, downright critical and sometimes juvenile efforts to understand his Filipino roots within the country’s disjointed history.

In themselves, these themes are multi-layered enough, but when inserted and added on to a distressed found space and found furniture, artworks and artifact cancel each other out in off-tangent, instead of conjunctural directions. Perhaps, had the project been more site-specific, workshop-based and participatory, instead of being artist-centered, theme-based and curator-driven, the act of “aggregation” or “pagkakapal” and “paglilingkis” could have been more integrative and dialogic. But then again, it could have been an entirely different show and project altogether, one that requires a more long-term residency and immersion, but it is a possibility we can look forward to in the next round, should there be one.

Now that we are all back home and can look back on the experience more dispassionately, we could buckle down to more homework and ask ourselves: what happens next? What are the residents doing about their museum? Has this project made any impact at all on the curator’s intended public? Or is the show more of an aberration that artists and community would rather forget? By addressing these and other vital questions, we can turn the cracks of this beleaguered biennial into “productive failures.”

And I suggest we could make this happen if, instead of privileging artists’ productions and our well-meaning curatorial intentions, we focus our discursive energies on the conversation and the encounter, even if, and especially because it is an uneasy one. This way, we could more competently foreground not only art’s relevance, but its capacity to transform an unyielding ground into a “rooted but always emergent terrain.”



### About Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art

Ctrl+P was founded in 2006 by Judy Freya Sibayan and Flaudette May V. Datuin as a response to the dearth of critical art publications in the Philippines. It is produced in Manila and published on the Web with zero funding. Contributors write gratis for Ctrl+P. Circulated as a PDF file via the Net, it is a downloadable and printable publication that takes advantage of the digital medium's fluidity, immediacy, ease and accessibility. Ctrl+P provides a testing ground for a whole new culture and praxis of publishing that addresses very specifically the difficulties of publishing art writing and criticism in the Philippines. It is currently part of *documenta 12 magazines project*, a journal of 97 journals from all over the world (<http://magazines.documenta.de/frontend/>)

### About Ctrl+P's Contributors

**Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez** is a faculty member of the Department of Art Studies, University of the Philippines and curatorial consultant at the Lopez Memorial Museum. She has managed international art projects and symposia including *Locus: Critiquing Critical Art* and serves as the managing editor of *Pananaw*, Philippine Journal of Visual Arts. Her essays have appeared in *Transit: A Quarterly of Art Discussion*, *Fine Art Forum*, *Forum on Contemporary Art and Society*, *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal*, *RealTime+Onscreen*, *ArtIT in Japan and Asia-Pacific*, *Visual Arts Magazine*, *Indonesia*, *Metropolis M*, *C-Arts*, and the *Sunday Inquirer Magazine*. **Matt Price** is a contemporary art writer and editor based in Birmingham and London. He studied art history at the University of Nottingham before completing an MA in curating contemporary art at the Royal College of Art, London. After graduating he began his career as an editor for Hans Ulrich Obrist before being appointed Managing Editor at *Flash Art*, Milan. Following this he worked as Deputy Editor at *ArtReview* and Publications Manager at *Serpentine Gallery*, London. He is currently working as a freelance editor and writer, with recent clients including *Manchester International Festival*, *Phaidon*, the *Centre for Contemporary Art*, *Kitakyushu*, and *Albion*, London. In addition to *Flash Art* and *ArtReview* he has also written for magazines including *A-n*, *Art Monthly*, *Fused* and *Frieze*. **Eliza Tan** is a writer from Singapore, currently residing in London. She holds an MA in Art History from the Courtauld Institute of Art, London. Her creative work has been published in literary zines and anthologies such as *No Other City* (Ethos Publications, Singapore), with a forthcoming publication under *FirstFruits*, Singapore. Her art writing has been featured in the *Substation Magazine* (Singapore) and *Sobranie* (Moscow) amongst others. She has been variously involved in projects such as the *Singapore Pavilion* (51st Venice Biennale) and *1st Singapore Biennale*, and has curated and conceptualized projects including the 2005 sculpture show 'State of Anxiety' at the National University of Singapore Museums. **Jason Farago** is a curator and writer. Born in New York and educated at Yale and the Courtauld Institute, he now lives in London. He is currently at work on *Sarkoland*, a multi-part project investigating the contours of the contemporary French scene that includes an exhibition of artists of the post-Palais de Tokyo generation and a suite of essays on the prehistory of the Sarkozy era. **Yong Soon Min** is an artist and independent curator. Her artistic practice, inclusive of curatorial projects, incorporates diverse media and processes that engage issues of representation and cultural identity, the intersection of history and memory, and the role of the artist and the arts as agents of social change. Her artwork has been exhibited and reviewed widely since the early 1980s. She currently is exhibiting a new video work at the *Gyonggi Museum* in Ansan. Curatorial projects include an exhibition and tribute for *Yiso Bahc*, *Los Angeles Koreatown history project*, and an international exhibition about the Korean diaspora for the *Fourth Gwangju Biennial* in Korea in 2002. She received MFA degree from UC Berkeley and participated in the *Whitney Museum Independent Study Program*. She is Professor in the *Studio Art* department at UC Irvine. **Katy Deepwell** is Reader in Contemporary Art, Theory and Criticism and Head of Research Training, University of the Arts, London. She is the founding editor of *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal* (1998-). Her books include: *Dialogues: Women Artists from Ireland* (IB Tauris, 2005); (ed) with Mila Bredikhina *Gender, Art, Theory Anthology, 1970-2000* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2005); (ed) *Art Criticism and Africa* (London: Saffron, 1997); (ed) *Women Artists and Modernism* (Manchester University Press, 1998); (ed) *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies* (Manchester University Press, 1995). **Gina Fairley** is a freelance writer currently based in Sydney. She has an MA in art administration (1996) from the College of Fine Arts, University of NSW. Formerly an arts manager in America and Australia, including the 2004 Biennale of Sydney, she's now Regional Contributing Editor for *Asian Art News* and *Art Asia Pacific*, and writes regularly for magazines from Malaysia to Bangladesh, Germany and Korea. In 2003 she established the alternative art venue, *SLOT* with artist Tony Twigg. She will again be based in the Philippines for an extended period in 2008 where she will be curating an exhibition on contemporary Filipino photography and time-based media for Sydney's UTS Gallery.

## About Ctrl+P's Editorial Board Members

**Flaudette May V. Datuin** is Associate Professor, Department of Art Studies, University of the Philippines (UP). A co-founder of Ctrl+p, she is also author of *Home Body Memory: Filipina Artists in the Visual Arts, 19th Century to the Present* (University of the Philippines Press, 2002). The book is based on her dissertation for the PhD in Philippines Studies (UP, 2001-2002). Datuin is recipient of the Asian Scholarship Foundation (ASF) and Asian Public Intellectual (API) fellowships, which enabled her to conduct research on contemporary women artists of China and Korea (2002-2003) and Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Japan (2004-2005). She is currently curating an international exhibition called *trauma, interrupted* to be held at the Cultural Center of the Philippines in June 2007 ([www.trauma-interrupted.org](http://www.trauma-interrupted.org)). Datuin currently teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on the contemporary arts of Asia, art criticism, art theory and aesthetics, and gender issues in the arts.

**Varsha Nair** lives in Bangkok, Thailand. Her selected shows include *Exquisite Crisis & Encounters*, New York, 2007 ([www.apa.nyu.edu](http://www.apa.nyu.edu)); *Subjected Culture-Interruptions and Resistances on Femaleness*, venues in Argentina till 2008 (<http://www.planoazul.com/default.php?idnoticias=1390>); *Sub-Contingent: The Indian Subcontinent in Contemporary Art*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, Italy, 2006; *EMAP - media in 'f'*, 5th EWHA Media Art Presentation, Seoul, Korea, 2005; *In-between places*, Si-Am Art Space, Bangkok, 2005; *Video as Urban Condition*, Austrian Culture Forum, London, 2004; *From My Fingers—Living in the Age of Technology*, Kaohsiung Museum of Art, Taiwan, 2003; *With(in)*, Art In General, New York, 2002; *Home/Dom*, Collegium Artisticum, Sarajevo, Bosnia Herzegovina, 2002; *Free Parking*, Art Center, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 2002 ([www.thingsmatter.com/project.php?proj=0234&mediaID=13](http://www.thingsmatter.com/project.php?proj=0234&mediaID=13)) She performed at *Saturday Live*, Tate Modern London, 2006; and at *National Review of Live Art*, at Tramway in Glasgow, 2006, at the Arches in Glasgow, 2004 ([www.newterritories.co.uk](http://www.newterritories.co.uk)), and at *National Review of Live Art* Midland, at the Railway Workshops in Perth, 2005 ([www.swan.wa.gov.au/nrla/](http://www.swan.wa.gov.au/nrla/)) Nair has co-organized/co-curated various art events and projects; she was also instrumental in setting up the *Womanifesto* website in 2003 ([www.womanifesto.com](http://www.womanifesto.com)). The last three projects for *Womanifesto*: *Womanifesto Workshop 2001*, *Procreation/Postcreation 2003* and the recently completed net-art project *No Man's Land*, were conceptualized by her. She was the Bangkok curator for *600 Images/60 artists/6 curators/6 cities: Bangkok/Berlin/London/Los Angeles/Manila/Saigon*, an exhibition that was simultaneously exhibited in all 6 cities in 2005. She was invitee speaker at the conference *Public Art In(ter)vention, Chiang Mai*, 2005; *Women's Art Networks: Varsha Nair and Wu Mali* in Conversation, Taipei Artist Village, Taipei, 2004; Presentation for EMAP, 5th Media Art Presentation held in conjunction with 9th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women, held at EWHA University, Seoul, Korea, 2005; *Art and Public Spaces* by SEAMEO-SPAFA Regional Centre for Archeology and Fine Arts, Bangkok, 2002; *Asia Now: Women Artists' Perspectives*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 2001; Exhibition symposium *Women Breaking Boundaries*, Hillside Forum, Tokyo, 2001; co.operation, a conference on feminist art practice and theory, Dubrovnic, Croatia, 2000. Her writings have been published in art and architecture journals such as *n.paradoxa*, *Art AsiaPacific*, and *art4d*. Born in Kampala, Uganda, Nair has a BFA from Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayaji Rao University, Baroda, India.

**Judy Freya Sibayan** has an MFA from Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design. She is former director of the erstwhile Contemporary Art Museum of the Philippines. In 2006, the City of Manila where she lives and works awarded her the *Patnubay ng Sining at Kalinagnan sa Bagong Pamamaraan Award*. She performed and curated *Scapular Gallery Nomad*, a gallery she wore daily for five years (1997-2002), and is currently co-curator and the *Museum of Mental Objects (MoMO)*, a work proposing that the artist's body be the museum itself (<http://www.trauma-interrupted.org/judy/writing1.pdf>). Although Sibayan's major body of work is an institutional critique of art, she has also exhibited and performed in museums, galleries and performance venues such as PEER Gallery Space, London; Privatladen in Berlin; The Tramway, Glasgow; the Vienna Secession; the Hayward Gallery, PS1 Contemporary Art Center, The Farm in San Francisco; Sternersmuseum, The Photographers' Gallery, London; ArtSpace Sydney; The Kiasma Contemporary Art Center, The Mori Art Museum, The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Nikolaj Contemporary Art Center, Fukuoka Art Museum; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Hong Kong Art Centre; and at the capcMusée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux. She has participated in two international art biennales, the 1986 *3rd Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh* and the 2002 *Gwangju Biennale*. Also an independent curator, she conceived and was lead-curator of *xsXL Expanding Art* held at Sculpture Square, Singapore in 2002 and *600 Images/60 Artists/6 Curators/6 Cities: Bangkok/Berlin/London/Los Angeles/Manila/Saigon* in 2005. Both projects investigated the possibilities of developing large scale international exhibitions mounted with very modest resources. She currently teaches as an Assistant Professor of the Department of Communication, De La Salle University ([www.dlsu.edu.ph](http://www.dlsu.edu.ph)) where she has taught for twenty years.