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At the end of the happy 1920s, while the United States was building its colossal skyscrapers, New York inaugurated the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), which would mark the artistic canon of the 20th century. In the 1970s, Paris transformed

its historic center with the Pompidou and a tubular architecture by Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano that stood as a work of art in itself: far from losing its leadership, the capital of old Europe wanted to continue to mark the pulse of an avant-garde without *isms*.

In November 2021, Hong Kong was to launch the spectacular M+, Asia's largest contemporary art center: a global museum of visual culture in the heart of Port Victoria Bay, with a striking design by Herzog & De Meuron. An immense luminous LED façade, a rooftop garden, a building that seems to levitate.... The coordinates of art have changed and the M+ symbolizes the growing power of Southeast Asia, the crossroads between East and West. Since 2019, Suhanya Raffel has been its director: first of a concept, now of Asia's flagship museum, which looks on equal footing with the MoMA or the Pompidou itself.

Raffel's biography reflects the nomadic essence of the South Pacific, of Hong Kong itself, where more than 40% of its inhabitants are foreigners: he was born in Sri Lanka but in the face of the country's political instability (which would eventually lead to civil war), his family emigrated to Australia when he was 14 years old. After graduating in Art History in Sydney, he went to the UK, where he worked at the Tate. In the 1990s, he took the reins of the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane, one of Australia's emblematic museums, and launched the Asia Pacific Triennial, which has become a reference today.

Since 2023, Raffel has chaired the International Committee of Museums and Collections of Modern Art (CIMAM), an organization founded in 1962 in The Hague, which today has more than 800 directors and curators from all over the world. She is one of the most powerful women in the art world, but her manners are different, her discourse more sensitive, her proposals more experimental and more innovative.

SUHANYA RAFFEL

She is one of the most powerful women in art: she chairs the International Committee of Museums of Modern Art and directs the powerful M+ of Hong Kong. "There are still surprising censorship," he says.

By Vanessa Graell. Photography: Manu Medir / Araba Press

his broadest view. This is the first interview he has given to the Spanish media.

P. The M+ is a very young museum, which we discovered because of the big Yayoi Kusama retrospective at the Guggenheim in Bilbao in 2022. In addition to an impressive building it has one of the largest collections in Asia. Is it the new icon of Hong Kong?

R. In the late 1990s, Hong Kong became the great international center of finance, innovation and technology, but there was a certain image of a *cultural desert*. Which is not quite true, because there were many creative platforms, but there was a lack of a major modern art museum. The M+ is Asia's first global museum of contemporary visual culture, a bedside institution for the 21st century. Our *raison d'être* is modern and contemporary art, but treated from an interdisciplinary perspective. That is why we work with design, architecture, art, moving images or ink, which is a very important discipline in the Asian context. For the first time, we have in Asia an institution comparable to the Pompidou in Paris or the MoMA in New York, both in scale, ambition and purpose. It is like Hong Kong itself.

Q. Is it significant that your slogan is 'visual culture' and not 'contemporary art'?

R. You have to go back to the genesis of MoMA in New York, when three women collectors [Abby Rockefeller, Lillie Plummer and Mary Quinn Sullivan] created an institution that looked at fashion, design, architecture and art as encompassing a whole modern purpose around culture. We do it in the 21st century and from Hong Kong, which is already a city saturated with visual culture: the cinema, the neon, the street life, the way the architecture has grown.... The image of the great Asian metropolis comes from Hong Kong: the vertical city, with a density of people rising up towards the sky. But more than 80% of the city is still nature, although it may be surprising, because we imagine it to be saturated and intense. And that is reflected in M+: a third of the museum space is public and open, with parks and leisure spaces for people to simply gather. On the other hand, the name M+ is very important, as it represents all disciplines, including those yet to come. The M+ is a museum. And more. We did not want to use the words *modern* and *contemporary* because of their association with canonical history.

Western. Because the way it is expressed modern outside Asia is very different.

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"THE CITIZENS NO TRUST IN POLITICIANS NOR IN THE MEDIA, BUT BUT ON THE MUSEUMS. WE HAVE AN

OBLIGATION TO TO THEM"

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