

The Museum and its Responsibilities

Global environment surrounding museums of modern and contemporary art has been continuously complex and diverse. The CIMAM Annual Conference is one of the most important gathering occasions for museum professionals to exchange ideas and discuss crucial issues to question its roles today.

Following intensive debates from previous conferences, CIMAM Annual Conference 2016 would like to address The Museum and Its Responsibilities, a fundamental and ontological question for CIMAM, from different perspectives around the world.

With the growing number of biennales, art fairs and other events of modern and contemporary art developing under respective political, economical and social contexts in the last decades, should museums be aware of any changes in their fundamental role and responsibilities? What responsibilities do museums have for the different communities and their audiences both locally and globally?

What are the professional responsibilities in terms of the institutional and individual ethics within the given funding and operational models of the museum? Does the funding model of the museum influence its social and artistic responsibility? What is the responsibility of the curators within their respective institutions while supporting artists' freedom of expression?

And what would be the responsibility of the museum when it comes to collection building, collection display, (re)writing Art History and archiving materials which might be lost in time otherwise?

The Conference will break down these major questions into thematic areas of discussion around which the three daily sessions will rotate.

Day 1: Friday 18 November 2016

Responsibility for the Community, Citizens and Society

Museums are at a crossroads. On the one hand, the pressure to become agents of a system that prioritizes the “spectacular”, the generation of value and an uncritical attitude that reinforces the idea that there are no alternatives, that our fate as individuals, as organizations and as societies has little margin to move beyond the status quo. On the other is their resistance against being a mere instrument. That’s where the responsibility of the museum appears to multiply uncertainty, working with soft truths that oppose the great unquestionable narratives – ultimately– with the aim to re-appropriate culture, in order to serve its people. Recalling our responsibility to the community, citizenship and society is but to understand that art, in our case, is an intrinsic part of human life.

To think about this responsibility involves considering the role of the museum as a public arena where the yearnings and aspirations of society and its ability to establish a laboratory for new institutional practice become visible. The museum has proposed to imagine the future departing from critical views about the past and present. Throughout the day, we will consider which are the many challenges we face in order to perform this function responsibly.

Day 2: Saturday 19 November 2016

Curators and Artists: New Parameters and New Responses

The changing context for museums, with new models emerging in different countries and financial pressures leading to greater commercialization in others, affects not just museum management but curatorial practice. Curators are increasingly expected to engage in fundraising and promotion in addition to working on collections and exhibitions. This raises ethical dilemmas and questions about the role of the curator within the institution.

Artists too are not immune to the pressures, especially in relation to work undertaken in response to the challenge of engaging new and diverse audiences. Moving outside the frame of the museum, how do artists respond to the social situations they encounter and how can they avoid tokenistic engagements to satisfy the funding parameters and the needs of the institution? Technology and social media also add a new dimension to museum practice and bring with them a whole new set of considerations. How curators and artists respond to the different pressures and the ethical dilemmas that arise will be the focus of this session.

Day 3: Sunday 20 November 2016

Collections and Archives

The number and type of art museums continue to grow across the world. Questions of what we collect, why we collect and whom we collect for have never been more relevant and contested. Many collections were initiated as instruments for the celebration of local and national identity. Many, especially in the West, built their collections to reflect a supposedly universal art history, a master narrative of modernism, which

is now widely considered as bound to the specificities of time and place. How are museums, old and new – western and non-western – creating new narratives of art history from different perspectives?

As public museums become – of necessity – more involved in the market place for private funds to support acquisitions and programs, and as private institutions grow their ‘public’ ambitions to share their collections with audiences do both sectors face the same or different responsibilities in relation to collecting and building archives of contemporary art? What is the relationship between ownership and public accessibility?

How is the existence of the Internet changing the role and responsibility of the museum in relation to collecting? How is the Internet changing the way knowledge is compiled and accessed? More and more independent organizations, including at grass roots, are taking responsibility for collecting materials relating to the visual arts, often in the absence of institutional support. How is this changing the nature of archive practice and what are the opportunities and challenges confronting the archives of the future.

CIMAM — International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art

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