

CIMAM 2015

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How Global Can Museums Be?

Within this question lie very relevant issues and challenges for museums of modern and contemporary art as institutions dedicated to public service: locality, nationality, internationality, exhaustive universalism, decolonization, global democracy, and economic dependence, among others. The question does not only refer to the ambition of encompassing the entire world with all its differences it interrogates if and how one single institutional model can be valid for the world's diversity of contexts.

Is the Museum as we know it the most appropriate institution to transmit the concept of freedom of expression? Is the museum the entity most capable of rewriting and modifying Art History? What alternative models have been tested to be effective and useful agencies in different communities? Is there a fixed protocol for the museum world that can be true and applied in global terms? Differences in economies, (modern) development, industrialization, education, traditions, cultural and/or religious contexts create a very diverse global landscape for the making, presentation and reception of art. Beyond stylistic or material specificities, symbolic and factual/historical issues will necessarily determine how the messages produced by artists are received through time, space, and generations. Censorship, freedom of expression, institutional fragility, and responsibility are conditions and values constantly being rearticulated and questioned in the different contexts that compose our globe.

How can museums negotiate a radical, innovative position within cultural tolerance/sensitivity, within the dominating conventions of service to the public, or within the dichotomy of public interests/private resources? Evolving from previous Conferences, these are some of the questions we would like to address during

the 2015 CIMAM Conference in Tokyo. The Conference will break down these major questions into thematic areas of discussion around which the three daily sessions will rotate.

Is the museum still a place for debate? Is freedom of expression up for debate within museums? Is it possible for museums to establish a universal deontological code, with a common set of values, rules or norms that are acceptable for all of us to envision an actual global exchange? How does the concept of freedom of expression translate to different localities? Local laws or codes may determine how symbols are used and generate meaning. Taboos may not only be local but also time specific. Within this frame, is cultural specificity compatible with the notion of global homogenization or with a set of values that can be valid for all? How can we manage/negotiate the need to defend the universal notion of freedom of expression and the responsibility this freedom implies? Is institutional responsibility synonymous with self-censorship?

Over the last years, important questions have been raised for curators, artists, managers, sponsors, and audiences regarding freedom of expression, censorship, and institutional responsibility, with complex ethical, legal, and artistic implications. While recognizing significant local differences, these issues will be debated through the analysis of different typologies of events and cases in order to work towards a shared understanding of principles and common guidelines.

How has modernism been perceived globally?

What is the vocabulary we are using to write the histories of art occurring outside of the main centers of power? While the structure and influence of academia concurs with economic and political powers, we want to interrogate how the different parameters of historical significance are being established: with which vocabularies and chronologies are the "other histories" to be written?

How has modernism been perceived in Asian regions such as China, Japan, Korea, or South and South East Asia? In the 2014 Conference we became familiar with regions that only very

recently started to play a role in the landscape of art, like the Middle East and the Gulf region.

These are places with a tradition of making and receiving modern art that evolved without the gallery and museum system operating the West. Previous conferences have exposed us to more examples of alternative models for art institutions, when compared with Western definitions. This evolving geography, within the digital era, is asking us to reconsider systems that have been implanted and operating until today, especially when we see that the Western Separation of powers" between the market, the museum, criticism, and the academia is disappearing. What are the alternatives to the historical model that have been built throughout the 20th Century? We propose to orient these questions towards the different Asian and other non-Western contexts.

Is there a global audience?

As the infrastructures of modern and contemporary art museums have been empowered by the economic/political interests of their respective regions, we are also facing an expanding diversity of audiences and civic subsystems connected to the museum model. Yet the emphasis on visitor numbers as the ultimate criteria and measurement for the museum's business performance and sustainable operation has paradoxically contributed to the museum's ontological fragility. The social media, a community in itself, has actively and rapidly become a tool of resistance. Their immediacy and impact beyond the museum space have opened new fronts that challenge the museum's comfort zone. We wish to continue exploring the notion of institutional autonomy. Beyond attendance quotas, museums do more and more to legitimize their performance by appealing to their anchorage in the local social, political, and cultural tissue. There is a future for culture that is being played, negotiated or confronted between what is inside and what is outside of local or national communities. How will museums of modern and contemporary art engage with participative citizenship, as opposed to the notion of the spectator/visitor?

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