

Not just a means of Economy. Curating New Media Art in the art market field

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Some weeks ago, I was invited to take part in a workshop organized by the main sponsor of a big new media art festival. The topic under debate was: what should be the future of the festival? Of course, there were many different positions on the table. Some people said that new media art is dead, others that it's more alive than ever; some said that the festival should avoid any compromise and be radical, others that it should gain the respect of the contemporary art world in order to survive and be successful. I was among them, of course.

At one point, a girl jumped up and said, in a polemic tone, something like this: “Hey guys, do we REALLY want to be taken seriously by the contemporary art world? Do we REALLY want to collaborate with it, to have to obey to the interests of a bunch of galleries and let them decide which artists we can show and which not?” These words were a turning point for the debate. Almost everybody seemed to agree with that girl, and nobody defended the option I humbly proposed: to turn the festival into a specialized event able to attract the same audience that moves restlessly from Documenta to the various Biennales, and not just the community that moves from, let's say, ISEA to Ars Electronica. At the same time, these words were a revelation

for me, because I understood that critics and curators are probably the most conservative part of this community.

At this point, you don't need to be that clever to understand that I completely disagree with that point of view. I have, I think, a lot of good reasons to think that way. First, because I don't see new media art as something separated from contemporary art. This "segregation" has historical reasons, and it is going to finish. Second, because I come from Italy. In Italy there is no institutional funding for new media art, and even if there is a bunch of people using this term, this very notion is quite confused. So, if you want to work seriously as an art critic and curator in Italy, you have to address contemporary art magazines and institutions. Third, because I know a lot of people from the contemporary art field, and they don't look that bad. Some of them are really smart, indeed. Fourth, because the art market field provided me with some good occasions to work. One of them was curating, in February 2009 the Expanded Box at Arco Art Fair in Madrid, that can be described roughly as the "new media art section of the fair". I was lucky enough to be invited to curate it again for February 2010, and that's one of the reasons why I'm here. And finally, because one of the few rules I think a curator should respect is: follow the artists. And guess where the artists are going?

The first part of my lecture would be a list. I think numbers mean something, and the number of new media artists working with galleries, and of galleries supporting new media art, is starting to be impressive. So, this is a first, forcefully incomplete list of new media artists working with galleries. In a couple of hours, I found out about one hundred and forty names, but probably you can help me to find out more...

1. AIDS 3D
2. ALAN RATH
3. ALEXEI SHULGIN /ELECTROBOUTIQUE

4. ALISON MEALEY
5. ALTERAZIONI VIDEO
6. ANNETT ZINSMEISTER
7. ANTOINE SCHMITT
8. ARCANGEL CONSTANTINI
9. BEN RUBIN
10. BERNARD MICHEL
11. BJÖRN SCHÜLKE
12. BOREDOMRESEARCH
13. BRODY CONDON
14. C.E.B. REAS
15. CAO FEI
16. CARSTEN NICOLAI
17. CHARLES SANDISON
18. CHRISTOPHE LUXEREAU
19. CLARA BOJ & DIEGO DIAZ
20. CLAUDE CLOSKY
21. CLAUDIA HART
22. COLLECTIVE MUSIC2EYE
23. CORY ARCANGEL
24. DAMON ZUCCONI
25. DANIEL CANOGAR

26.DANIEL ROZIN

27.DRAGAN ESPENSHIED

28.DU ZHENJUN

29.EDDO STERN

30.EDMOND COUCHOT ET MICHEL BRET

31.EDUARDO KAC

32.EDUARDO KAC

33.EELCO BRAND

34.ELECTRONIC SHADOW

35.ESTHER MANAS & ARASH MOORI

36.ETOY.CORPORATION

37.EVA AND FRANCO MATTES AKA 0100101110101101.ORG

38.FABIEN GIRAUD

39.FENG MENGBO

40.FRANCIS HUNGER

41.FRED NAUCZYCIEL

42.GAZIRA BABELI

43.GEBHARD SENGMULLER

44.GERHARD MANTZ

45.GERO GRIES

46.GILLES CONAN

47.GINT GABRANS

- 48.GOLAN LEVIN
- 49.GRANULAR SYNTHESIS
- 50.GRÉGORY CHATONSKY
- 51.GUTHRIE LONERGAN
- 52.HERBERT W. FRANKE
- 53.HOLGER LIPPMANN
- 54.JAKUB NEPRAS
- 55.JAMES FAURE WALKER
- 56.JAMES PATERSON
- 57.JAVIER MORALES
- 58.JEAN-PIERRE HÉBERT
- 59.JENNIFER AND KEVIN MCCOY
- 60.JENNY MARKETOU
- 61.JILLIAN MCDONALD
- 62.JIM CAMPBELL
- 63.JOAN LEANDRE
- 64.JODI
- 65.JOHN F. SIMON JR.
- 66.JOHN GERRARD
- 67.JOHN KLIMA
- 68.JOHN-MICHAEL BOLING
- 69.JULIUS POPP

70.JULIUS VON BISMARCK

71.KENNETH TIN-KIN HUNG

72.LAB[AU]

73.LARS ARRHENIUS

74.LAWRENCE MALSTAF

75.LEO VILLAREAL

76.LINCOLN SCHATZ

77.LISA JEVBRATT

78.LUC COURCHESNE

79.LYNN HERSHMAN

80.MACIEJ WISNIEWSKI

81.MANFRED MOHR

82.MANFRED MOHR

83.MARCIN RAMOCKI

84.MARGRET EICHER

85.MARINA ZURKOW

86.MARIUS WATZ

87.MARK NAPIER

88.MARK WILSON

89.MARKO PELJHAN

90.MATHIEU KAVYRCHINE

91.MATTHEW MCCASLIN

92.MICHAEL BELL-SMITH

93.MICHAEL JOAQUIN GREY

94.MICHAEL NAJJAR

95.MIGUEL CHEVALIER

96.MIHAI GRECU

97.MONICA BRAVO

98.NANNA HANNINEN

99.NATALIE JEREMIJENKO

100.NICOLE NICKEL

101.OLAFUR ELIASSON

102.OLIA LIALINA

103.OLIVER LARIC

104.PALLE TORSSON

105.PASCUAL SISTO

106.PAUL B. DAVIS

107.PAUL DE MARINIS

108.PAUL SLOCUM

109.PAULO NENFLIDIO

110.PERRY HOBERMAN

111.PETER VOGEL

112.PETRA CORTRIGHT

113.PORS & RAO

114.PSJM

115.QUIDO SEN

116.R. LUKE DUBOIS

117.RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER

118.RAQS MEDIA COLLECTIVE

119.REYNALD DROUHIN

120.ROMAN VEROSTKO

121.ROSEMARIE FIORE

122.SAMUEL BIANCHINI

123.SHANE HOPE

124.SHILPA GUPTA

125.SON:DA

126.THOMAS LANNES

127.THOMSON & CRAIGHEAD

128.TOBIAS BERNSTRUP

129.U-RAM CHOE

130.UBERMORGEN.COM

131.VERA MOLNAR

132.VUK COSIC

133.WOLFGANG STAEHLE

134.YAEL KANAREK

135.YOUNG-HAE CHANG HEAVY INDUSTRIES

136.YVES NETZHAMMER

And this is a list of galleries dealing with new media art:

1. A Gentil Carioca, Rio de Janeiro (BR)
2. ADN Galeria, Madrid (SP)
3. Alma Gallery, Riga (LV)
4. AND / OR Gallery, Dallas (US)
5. Anita Beckers, Frankfurt (DE)
6. ARC Projects, Sofia (BU)
7. Art Claims Impulse, Berlin (DE)
8. Arthobler, Porto (PT)
9. ArtMovingProjects, New York (US)
- 10.Bitforms Gallery, New York (US)
- 11.Black Box Gallery, Copenhagen (DK)
- 12.Bodhi Art, Mumbai (India)
- 13.Bryce Wolkovitz Gallery, New York (US)
- 14.Conner Contemporary Art, Washington DC (US)
- 15.DAM Gallery, Berlin (DE)
- 16.DNA Gallery, Berlin (DE)
- 17.Dogenhaus Gallery, Leipzig (DE)
- 18.Espacio Liquido, Gijon (SP)

19. Fabio Paris Art Gallery, Brescia (IT)
20. Fortlaan 17, Gent (BE)
21. Foxy Productions, New York (US)
22. Galeria MS, Madrid (SP)
23. Galeria Valle Orti, Valencia (SP)
24. Galerie Laurent Godin, Paris (FR)
25. Galerie Metro, Berlin (DE)
26. Galleria Continua, San Gimignano (IT)
27. Gallery Specta, Copenhagen (DK)
28. Gering & López Gallery, New York (US)
29. Gigantic Artspace, New York (US)
30. Guy Bartschi Gallery, Geneve (CH)
31. Haunch of Venison, London (UK)
32. Hilger Contemporary, Vienna (AT)
33. Lia Rumma, Milan / Naples (IT)
34. Lombard Freid Gallery, New York (US)
35. Max Estrella, Madrid (SP)
36. Max Wigram Gallery, London (UK)
37. Nature Morte, New Dehli (IN)
38. Numeriscausa, Paris (FR)
39. Pace Wilderstein, New York (US)
40. Pierre Francois Ouellette, Montreal (CA)

41. Postmasters Gallery, New York (US)
42. Priska C. Juschka Fine Art, New York (US)
43. Project Gentili, Prato (IT)
44. Seventeen Gallery, London (UK)
45. Shanghart Gallery, Shanghai (China)
46. Skuc Gallery, Ljubljana (SI)
47. Team Gallery, New York (US)
48. Vadehra Art Gallery, New Dehli (India)
49. Virgil de Voldere, New York (US)
50. Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou (China)
51. XL Gallery, Moscow (RU)

In the second half of my talk I'd like to argue why, in my opinion, the art market is (still) important for New Media Art. Of course, one can suggest that an old economic model based on the selling of a unique, or at least, rare object may not fit to an art form which is, for its very nature, replicable, variable, etc.; and that New Media Art, for its connections with technology, misses the auratic aspect that is needed in order to invest a lot of money in a work of art. He can go on saying that New Media Art may deserve a new model of distribution and circulation, and that the New Media themselves show the way: the Internet, p2p networks, software distribution and so on.

Of course, this is all true. I don't want to say that the art market should become THE economic model for New Media Art, but just that it can be one of them. The problem is: why? Why, for instance, Granular Synthesis should go on collaborating with Lia Rumma if selling prints produces a very little part of their revenue? If it

produces so little satisfaction if compared with a direct exchange with a real audience? If it has proven to be such a weak economic model, unable to pay the bills to the vast majority of contemporary artists?

There are a number of answers to this question. These are mine ones:

1. The art market has an important role in the contemporary art world. In most of the cases, private galleries discover new artists, bring them all around the world, introduce them to art critics, curators and collectors, pay their installations in museums and biennial, and sometimes pay their bills. The relationship gallery – artist is not easy, of course; and the other side of the coin can be really sad. But, when an artwork enters an important, private or public, collection, part of the fault goes probably to the artist's gallery. The same can be said when it is featured into an art history book. One can say that museums' storages are full of artworks and artists nobody remembers about, and the same can be said for art books. He can also say that he doesn't give a fuck about museums and art books. Of course, in that case he doesn't need the art market.

2. But if you think that art books can give a future audience to your work, and that museums can care about it, you may want to enter them. The art market may help you doing that, not only promoting your work, but also financing and producing it. The Expanded Box at Arco is a good example of this.

3. Producing an artwork with a gallery is different than producing an artwork for, let's say, ISEA. If you show an artwork in ISEA, it has to be challenging, interesting, meaningful. If you show an artwork with a gallery, it has also to be desirable and salable. You may say this is a compromise. For me, it's just another challenge, the attempt to address another audience.