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10 international curators visualize the future of contemporary art

A ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION — *Elena Filipovic, Douglas Fogle, Yukie Kamiya, Inés Katzenstein, Chus Martínez, Kitty Scott, Debra Singer, Adam Szymczyk, Catherine Wood, & Tirdad Zolghadr*



Frieze Art Fair, London, 2007



Phaidon

In the autumn of 2007, at London's Frieze Art Fair, the critic Dave Hickey gave a keynote address about the current state of the art world and its market. Referring to the hyper-activity of the fair, he said: 'As exciting as this is, imagine how exciting the collapse will be.' This foreshadowing took place at a moment when the art world was ballooning with hitherto unseen levels of wealth and production. Since then — in a dramatically short space of time — it has felt the reverberations of the current global recession. Undeniably, the art world is experiencing the onset of change due to the economic climate, and many conversations concerning value and content have begun to circulate. As curators working in various cities all over the world in differing curatorial capacities, both independent and institutional, what transformation or adjustments do you see happening in both curatorial and artistic practices?



Debra Singer

Historically, moments of economic recession have been extremely interesting times for meaningful art-making, at least in New York. So it's hard not to remain a little bit optimistic that we'll see some important and courageous new work coming down the pike. At an institutional level, the specific financial events of autumn 2008 in New York had a swift and seismic effect, leading to an immediate and significant decline in individual philanthropy throughout the city, which is a mainstay of funding for arts groups here. In this respect, smaller institutions like The Kitchen have probably been weathering the storm a bit more easily than the larger museums. We're perhaps more nimble in our ability to respond quickly to such change. Small non-profit arts institutions

don't have huge endowments, for instance, to rely on for operating funds, so don't suffer from huge fluctuations in those resources. Similarly, for emerging artists in particular, it's not as though the booming go-go days were especially different for them. When you're starting out, resources are always scarce, and you have to be inventive. Going from 'How can we do more with a little?' to 'How can we do more with less?' isn't such a big leap — yet. Obviously, the full effects of this current recession have yet to be felt; let's hope it doesn't go on for too many years.

Inés Katzenstein

In the last years, countries like Argentina, where I work, have enjoyed in a very small way the reverberations of the affluence referred to by Hickey: the small but relevant growth of the local art market, a slow process of professionalization of the art system with some local museums showing international exhibitions. But those reverberations haven't changed the way artists

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and the art world operate. Our context is always one of austerity and therefore one in which a sense of permanent construction pervades everything, beyond our financial circumstances.

With this, I'm not suggesting that the global financial circumstances don't affect our work, but rather that a sense of crisis (and a context of financial scarcity) is inherent to the way in which

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Michael Portnoy

Relational Stalinism

Michael Portnoy works not only as an artist but also as a choreographer and a musician, often devising unexpected places where his various disciplines can meet. He often creates collaborative performances, such as in *The K Sound* (2006), where a series of experimental jokes were enacted by a diverse cast of performers, dancers and actors in tightly choreographed scenes.

In the *Dudion Levers* (2008), he collaborated with engineer and amateur malacologist Oliver Sudden to devise *The Instrument*, which comprises two elements: a 'Microphone' (in the form of a giant pair of walnut clogs, which ascend into a kind of scimitar), and a 'Cooker'. Portnoy chooses three objects to form the basis of a new work, then proceeds to sing about this project into the Microphone. In the artist's words, the apparatus transfigures his song into a medley of 'orchestral instruments, synthesizers, drums, guitars (based on the pitch, intonation and many other variables) and this song is inscribed upon the assemblage of objects in mother of pearl graphic notation'.

Portnoy likes to call his take on interaction with the audience 'Relational Stalinism': participation without the populism, involvement without the moral double standards. In sum, the fashionable promise that an artwork might offer a democratic magic, transforming inter-relational codes into something nicer, is abandoned in favour of a clarification of the artist's imperious role as producer and performer vis à vis the spectators. In *Wandbiss* (2007), patrons were on their knees within a cramped space, craning and contorting as they tried to bite morsels of haute cuisine served on edible skewers erratically protruding from the walls. On another occasion (*Casino Ilinx*, 2008), participants, who were hand-picked exclusively by the artist, engaged in vertiginous games within a casino ambience involving terrifying sculptural props made of engraved sheep bones, quilted maple veneer, vibrant industrial felt and lacquered Brahmin-Glagolitic fonts. In *Filzungeungewiss* (2008) Portnoy continuously



Wandbiss, 2007. Plexiglas, wood, 10 course bite-size meal. 2 x 2 m



Filzungeungewiss, 2008. Felt, 34 x 275 x 284 cm



The Instrument, 2008. Microphone, American black walnut, electronics, 178 x 81 x 152 cm. *Microphone*, 2008. American black walnut, electronics, 178 x 81 x 152 cm. *Cooker*, 2006. American black walnut, copper, gold leaf, felt, mother-of-pearl shells, machinery, electronics, 102 x 117 x 102 cm



Talus, 2007. Dye aublimated felt, wood, brass, silver, engraved sheep ankle bones, painted and burnt die, mother-of-pearl shells, leather, 50 kapeek nores, 90 x 107 x 196 cm



The K Sound, 2006. Performance



The Dudian Levers, 2008. Performance

reinvented the complicated rules as he went along: 'Drop the two. Now hold it. Necessary's are in-between. 10 on the table. Re-release the table to complete.' In *A Seminar in Sublingual Carnage — The 33 Holdmusic Variations* (2008), unsuspecting figures of the Art Review Power 100 and CEOs of waste management companies were called up before a live audience and fed elaborate stories connecting the two industries then told to hold for several minutes while Portnoy sang smooth jazz 'hold' music.