

«Soy lugar común como el eco de las voces el rostro de la luna»

# VOICE OVER

## EXHIBITIONS

N°6

with  
**REGINA JOSÉ  
GALINDO**

magazine for discourse

CE OVER CULTURE\_VOICE OVER BAD AI\_VOICE OVER PATRIARCHY\_VOICE OVER INSTITUTION



\_VOICE OVER BORDERS\_VOICE OVER LANGUAGE\_VOICE OVER CONFLICT\_VOICE OVER LIFE\_V



Internazionale d'Arte

Artista under 35

espresso

courtesy Santiago Sierra and Ida Pisani - Prometeo Gallery

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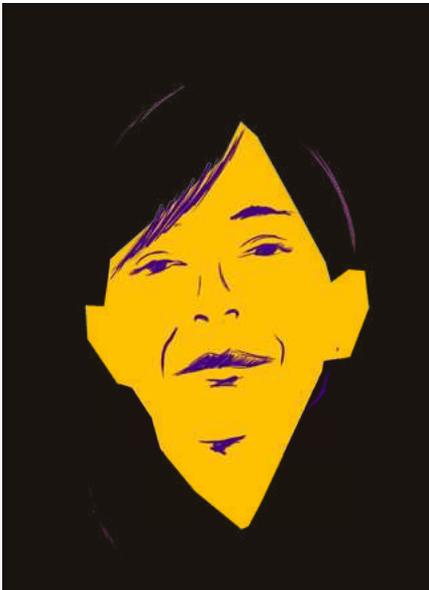
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De la vagina de una  
reina

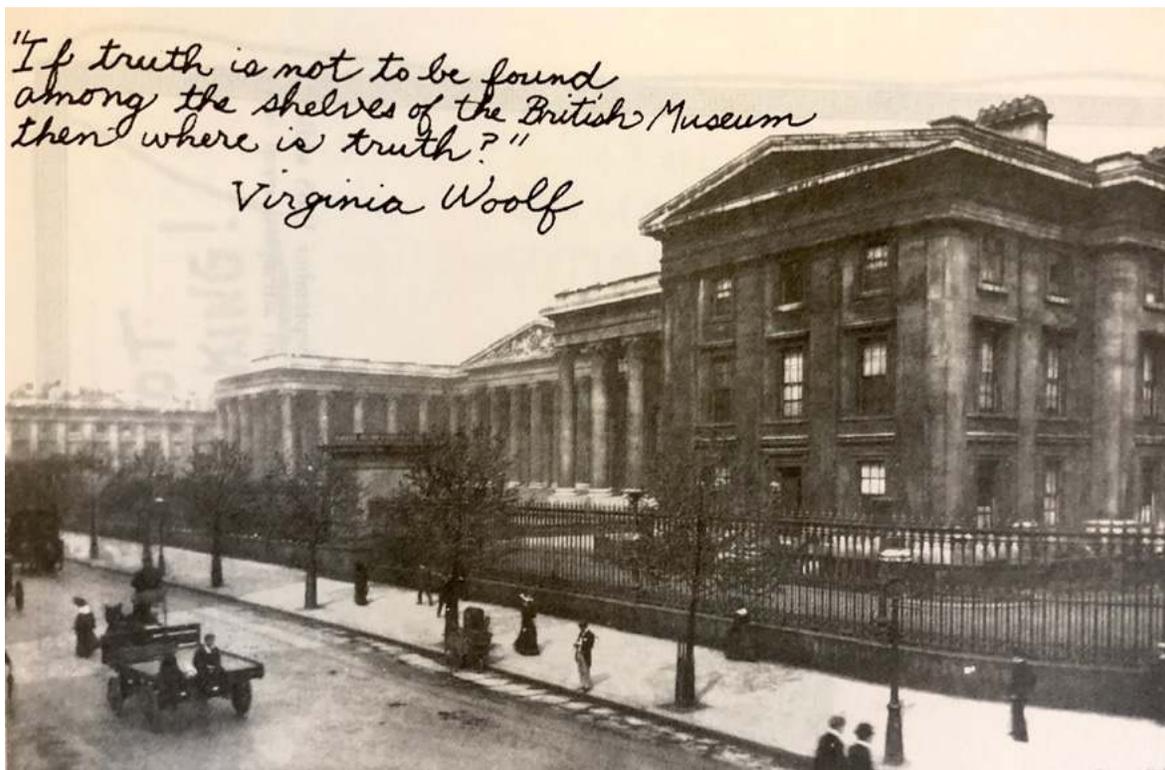
así

nací.

No hubo cigüeña  
ni mago

sólo sexo.

Regina José Galindo



Over the last decade or so, the art world, and especially artists, faced an implicitness so vast that it has become indistinguishable from indifference, and this has been fatal. Fatal, because the moment the public disengages itself collectively from art, even to refrain from criticizing it, contemporary art becomes irrelevant: a mere high-end token legitimizing its multilayered institutional architecture, where artists become the major labor force of a decadent industry. **But hey, fatal is good!** Today the lofty principles that motivated artists and art institutions seem quaint. Thus, some of us might fancy a hostile or unaware public, or even a fanatically prudish one, as a lively and energetic response to the lethal indifferent one. As many artists turned away from “traditional” art practices and found a renewed bond with academia and academic research, cultural and art institutions also started moving at mammoth pace along new - but flagged - trails. They are indeed in search of an up-to-date relevance within society’s narrative. Many museums have stepped onto alternative paths of storytelling to embrace practices of redress and repair, supposedly going backwards in the linear narratives of progress and power.

The present issue gives us insight into museums’ and art institutions’ visions and dreams for future practices. But the volume also leaves an essential question open: how do artists find relevance in an institutional context aiming to mobilize affect, empathy and recognition in their own storytelling efforts? There is a contradiction between those who can’t think straight and create new ways of seeing and new tools for understanding, with the structuring and normalizing needs of those who are shaping the artistic great “outdoors” for a wider public. But Narrative is the truth. Truth embodies fiction. Fiction glamorizes misery. Inequality serves narrative, and narrative seems to be what we are constantly looking for. Narrative of power, narrative of freedom, narrative of escape, narrative of legitimate history, narrative of historical repair, narrative of inclusiveness, narrative of class or gender deconstruction, narrative of righteousness, narrative of change, narrative of broadmindedness, narrative of truth. We are in contradiction, but now that art has become irrelevant we need counter narratives to deal with contradiction, big time. **But hey, counter narrative is good!** Let’s see what happens.

**DAVID LUER**

# EXIBITIONISMUS!!

MASSIMO MAZZONE

Il “museo” è il soggetto di questo incontro ideato da Escuela Moderna/Ate-  
neo Libertario e David Liver, ospitato negli spazi di Biennale Sessions 2021.

Dopo i numeri dedicati a Conflitti, Cattiva intelligenza artificiale, Frontiere,  
Patriarcato, Periferie, arriva EXIBITIONISMUS!! Il termine scritto in tedesco  
si traduce con “esibizionismo” e vuole essere un rimando al Benjamin de  
L’opera d’arte nell’epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica, al concetto di  
Ausstellungswert, ovvero del “valore di esposizione”, così come formulato  
all’inizio del quinto paragrafo:

*Die Rezeption von Kunstwerken erfolgt mit verschiedenen Akzenten, unter  
denen sich zwei polare herausheben. Der eine dieser Akzente liegt auf dem  
Kunstwerk, der andere auf dem Ausstellungswert des Kunstwerkes. Die künst-  
lerische Produktion beginnt mit Gebilden, die im Dienste des Kults stehen.  
Von diesen Gebilden ist, wie man annehmen darf, wichtiger, daß sie vorhan-  
den sind als daß sie gesehen werden.*

La ricezione delle opere d’arte avviene con diversi accenti, tra i quali spic-  
cano due poli. Uno di questi accenti è sull’opera d’arte, l’altro sul valore es-  
positivo dell’opera. La produzione artistica inizia con oggetti che servono  
al culto. Si può supporre che sia più importante che questi oggetti esistano  
piuttosto che essere visti.

Il museo è storicamente figlio del saccheggio e delle guerre, del colonialis-  
mo occidentale, fratello delle esposizioni universali e del circo equestre,  
cugino delle olimpiadi e della Formula 1. Il museo è senza dubbio un grande  
dispositivo sociale di attribuzione di “valore” e di “prezzo” ma è anche por-  
tatore di valori immateriali che fanno da collante alla società, occidentale e  
non solo. Il museo ci interroga e a sua volta viene interrogato da ciascun vi-  
sitatore, qual è oggi il pubblico del museo? Il museo parla a tutti o solo a un  
segmento della società? Quale ruolo riveste l’arte e l’arte contemporanea

The «museum» is the subject of this session conceived by Escuela Moderna/Ateneo Libertario and David Liver, hosted in the spaces of Biennale Sessions 2021.

After the previous issues dedicated to Conflicts, Artificial Intelligence, Frontiers, Patriarchy, Peripheries, comes EXHIBITIONISMUS!!! The term in German translates as «exhibitionism» and is intended as a reference to Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility*, to the concept of *Ausstellungswert*, or «exhibition value», as formulated at the beginning of the fifth paragraph:

*Die Rezeption von Kunstwerken erfolgt mit verschiedenen Akzenten, unter denen sich zwei polare herausheben. Der eine dieser Akzente liegt auf dem Kunstwerk, der andere auf dem Ausstellungswert des Kunstwerkes. Die künstlerische Produktion beginnt mit Gebilden, die im Dienste des Kults stehen. Von diesen Gebilden ist, wie man annehmen darf, wichtiger, daß sie vorhanden sind als daß sie gesehen werden.*

Works of art are received and valued on different planes. Two polar types stand out; with one, the accent is on the cult value; with the other, on the exhibition value of the work. Artistic production begins with ceremonial objects destined to serve in a cult. One may assume that what mattered was their existence, not their being on view.

Historically, the museum is the child of plundering and wars, of western colonialism, the brother of universal exhibitions and the circus, the cousin of the Olympics and of Formula 1. The museum is undoubtedly a great social device for attributing «value» and «price», but it is also the bearer of immaterial values that bind society together, in the West and beyond. Museums question us and are in turn questioned by each visitor: what is the museum's public today? Does the museum speak to everyone or only to a segment of the public sphere? What role does art and contemporary art play in our lives? And does research in art have anything to do with public, critical, or market success?

nelle nostre vite? E la ricerca in arte ha qualcosa a che vedere col successo di pubblico, di critica o di mercato?

Il numero di Voice Over, attraverso contributi scritti e video, tenta di rispondere a queste importanti domande. Accanto a grandi musei milionari e grandi esposizioni internazionali, vivono piccoli musei locali e rivoluzionari, pensiamo al Museo dell'Innocenza di Orhan Pamuk, o al Musée d'art Moderne, Département des Aigles di Marcel Broodthaers, al Museo immaginario di André Malraux, alla Mnemosyne di Aby Warburg, ma penso anche alla mia città, Roma, al progetto Edicola Notte curato per anni dall'artista H. H. Lim, oppure al museo all'aperto in prossimità dell'Ara Pacis Augustea realizzato nel corso di decenni da Fausto delle Chiaie, o ad ART Tellaro Fourteen curato da Gino D'Ugo, oppure a New Eldorado di Guillaume Clermont, o ancora al museo continuo o Mobile Architecture ideato da Yona Friedman, il Museo Baldio in Brasile di Janice Martins Appel, un museo vegetale e mobile, o ancora all'esperienza valenziana di Domingo Mestre con il suo United Artist from the Museum.

Ma il museo ha anche origini misteriose, è nipote della Wunderkammer, delle dissezioni dei cadaveri, legate a grotte e cave e resti di edifici antichi, legato a realtà ipogee, luogo di orge e di scorticamento di cadaveri a fini anatomici, e di quella origine, come in una operazione aritmetica riporta a capo il resto. Perché tirare in ballo le grotte parlando di musei? Perché quelle grotte e quelle cave, quei resti di civiltà sepolte furono il luogo della nascita dell'indagine anatomica, dell'approccio scientifico al corpo umano, in barba alle proibizioni religiose, e luogo dove arte e scienza si incontrarono. Inoltre quelle rovine ospitavano resti architettonici, capitelli, mosaici, suppellettili e statue, dipinti e oggetti d'uso. Le pareti dei Ninfei e dei Musei erano istoriate.

Le grottesche sono un soggetto pittorico di decorazione parietale molto popolare a partire dal Cinquecento e a cui il Vasari dedica il capitolo XXVII della sua Introduzione alle tre arti del disegno. La decorazione a grottesca è caratterizzata dalla raffigurazione di esseri ibridi e mostruosi, chimere, spesso ritratte quali figurine esili ed estrose, che si fondono in decorazioni geometriche e naturalistiche, strutturate in maniera simmetrica, su uno sfondo in genere bianco o comunque monocromo. Le figure sono molto colorate e danno origine a cornici, effetti geometrici, intrecci e quant'altro, ma sempre mantenendo una certa levità e ariosità, per via del fatto che in genere i soggetti sono lasciati minuti, quasi calligrafici, sullo sfondo. L'illustrazione prevalentemente fantasiosa e ludica, non sempre persegue

This issue of *Voice Over*, through written and video contributions, attempts to answer these important questions. Alongside the great multimillion-dollar museums and major international exhibitions, there are small, local, revolutionary museums, such as Orhan Pamuk's Museum of Innocence, or Marcel Broodthaers' Musée d'art Moderne, Département des Aigles, André Malraux' Imaginary Museum, Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne, but I am also thinking of my own city, Rome, with the Edicola Notte project curated for years by the artist H. H. Lim, or the open-air museum near the Ara Pacis Augustea created over decades by Fausto delle Chiaie, or to ART Tellaro Fourteen curated by Gino D'Ugo, or to Guillaume Clermont's New Eldorado (in Montréal), or to the Continuous or Mobile Architecture museum designed by Yona Friedman, the Baldio Museum in Brazil by Janice Martins Appel, a plant and mobile museum, or to the Valencian experience of Domingo Mestre with his United Artist from the Museum.

But the museum also has mysterious origins, it is the grandson of the Wunderkammer, of the dissection of corpses, linked to caves and chambers and the remains of ancient buildings, linked to hypogeal realities, places of orgies and the flaying of corpses for anatomical purposes, and from that origin, as in an arithmetic operation, it brings back the rest. Why bring up caves when talking about museums? Because those caves and quarries, those remains of buried civilisations, were the birthplace of anatomical investigation, of the scientific approach to the human body, in defiance of religious prohibitions, and the place where art and science met. Moreover, these ruins housed architectural remains, capitals, mosaics, furnishings and statues, paintings and objects of use. The walls of Nymphaea and Museums were illustrated.

Grotesques are in fact a very popular pictorial subject of wall decoration from the 16th century onwards, to which Vasari dedicated chapter XXVII of his Introduction to the three arts of drawing. Grotesque decoration is characterised by the depiction of hybrid and monstrous beings, chimeras, often portrayed as slender and whimsical figurines, which blend into geometric and naturalistic decorations, structured in a symmetrical manner on a generally white or at least monochrome background. The figures are very colourful and give rise to frames, geometric effects, weaves and so on, but always maintaining a certain lightness and airiness, due to the fact that the subjects are generally left minute, almost calligraphic, in the background. The predominantly imaginative and playful illustration does not always pursue a purely ornamental function, but sometimes also has a didactic and encyclopedic purpose, reproducing inventories of the arts and sciences or depictions with an eponymous character.

una funzione puramente ornamentale, ma riveste talvolta anche uno scopo didascalico ed enciclopedico, riproducendo inventari delle arti e delle scienze o raffigurazioni a carattere eponimo.

Il nome “grottesca”, come spiega il Cellini nella sua autobiografia, deriva dalle grotte del colle Esquilino a Roma, che in realtà altro non erano che i resti sotterranei della Domus Aurea Neroniana scoperti nel 1480 e divenuti immediatamente popolari tra i pittori dell’epoca che spesso si fecero calare nelle grotte non più solo per eseguire orge, danze con gli scheletri, scarnificazioni e lezioni d’Anatomia, ma per incontrare finalmente le Muse e per studiare le fantasiose pitture rinvenute. Infatti anche le parole mosaico, musivo, museo, rivelano sorprese teatrali. Non è facile stabilire con precisione l’origine del termine «mosaico»: l’uomo ha da sempre manifestato una naturale inclinazione a decorare suppellettili, spazi e architetture, utilizzando sia pigmenti sia pietruzze già colorate dalla natura stessa o meglio ancora conchiglie ossa e altri fossili provenienti dal sottosuolo. Lo stesso termine mosaico è di origine incerta: alcuni lo fanno derivare dal greco Μωσαϊκόν (musaikòn), «opera paziente degna delle muse»; in latino veniva chiamato opus musivum, cioè «opera delle muse» oppure «rivestimento applicato alle grotte dedicate alle muse stesse». Il richiamo alle Muse è dovuto all’usanza degli antichi di costruire nei giardini, nelle vigne e negli orti delle ville, grotte e anfratti dedicati alle Ninfe (Ninpheum) o alle Muse (Musaeum), decorandone le pareti con sassi e conchiglie.

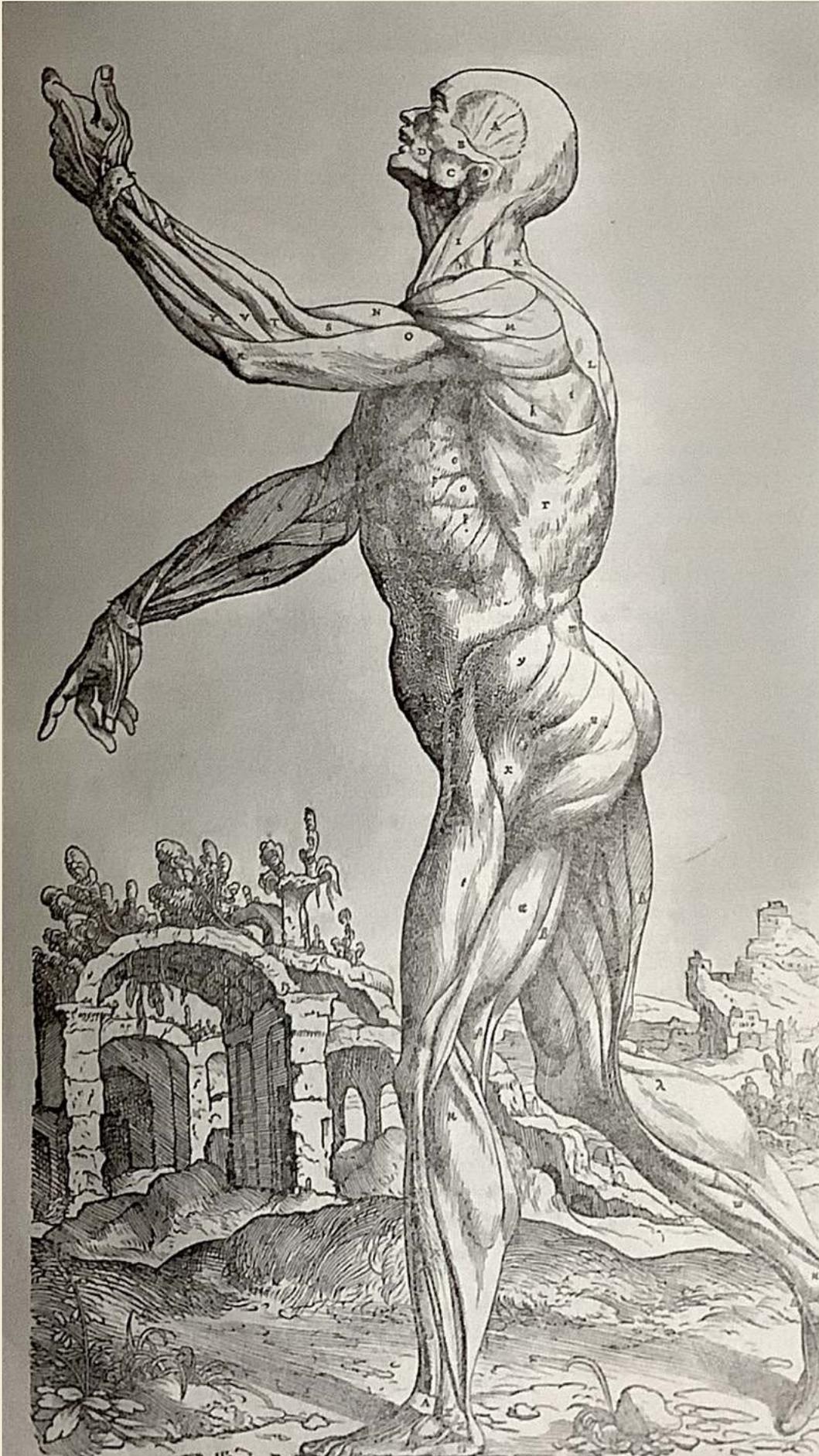
Quindi musaeum o musivum indica la grotta e opus musaeum o opus musivum indicano il tipo di decorazione murale. In seguito si affermò l’uso dell’aggettivo musaicus a indicare l’opera musiva. Il termine potrebbe infine derivare anche dall’arabo muzauwaq قوادم che significa “mosaico” o ancora DIKUR روكيـد che significa «decorazione».

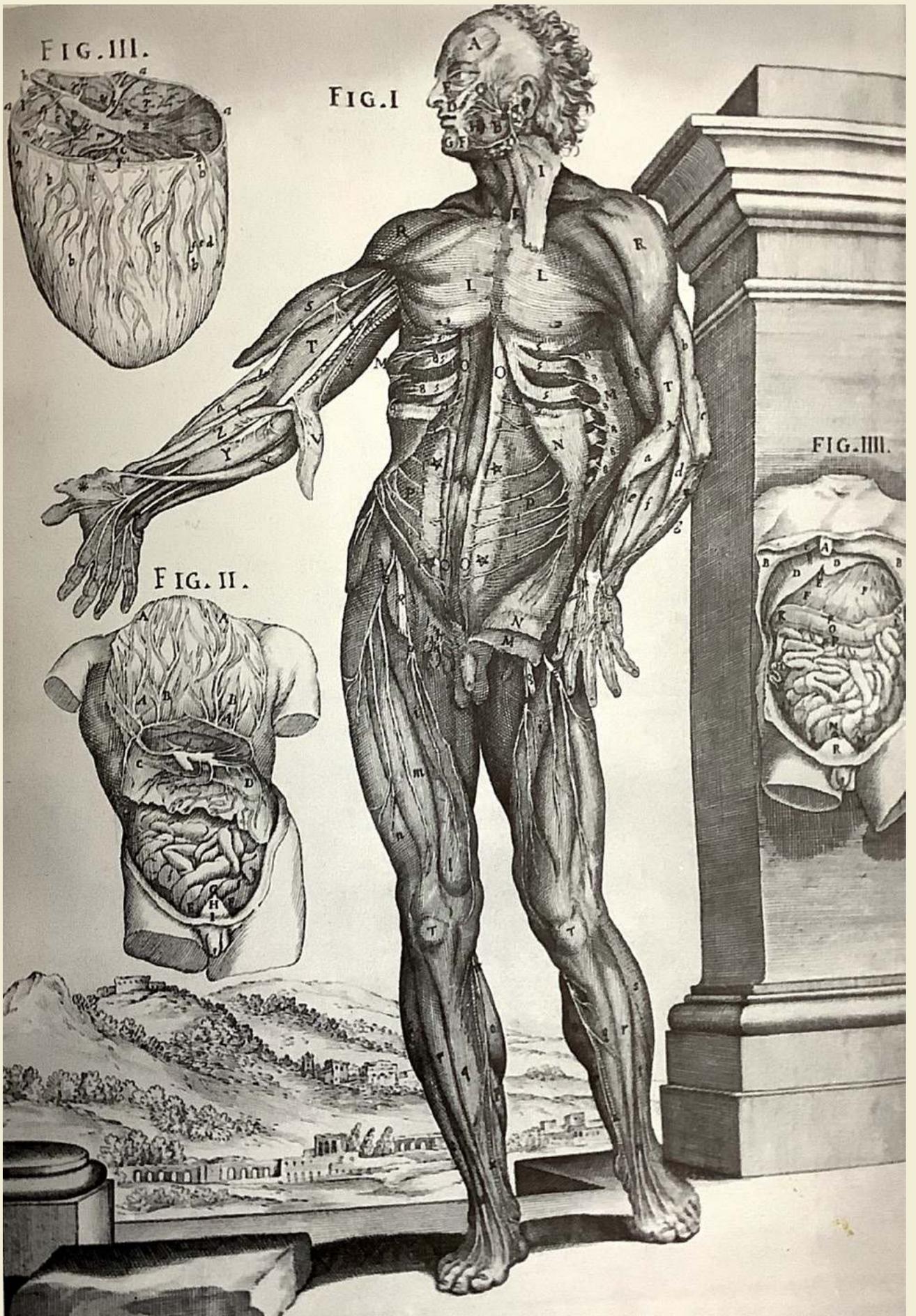
La nostra posizione è senza dubbio quella dell’ascolto, quella della memoria, quella del restituire ricerca al ruolo sociale del museo, non già seguire il flusso della valorizzazione. Forse il Museo potrebbe trovare come allora tempio delle Muse, nella sua natura ipogea e misterica una scena per delle lezioni di anatomia, forse il museo, abitandolo invece che visitandolo, come nel caso del Metropolit o del Macro Asilo di Roma, potrebbe riavvicinarsi alla vita. Il museo d’arte contemporanea ha ancora coscienza di quanto abbiamo scritto? Oppure è trincerato dietro un ruolo ‘sincronico’ e ubbidiente al corso degli eventi che detta il capitalismo e così facendo proprio il Museo resta fuori dal flusso dell’analisi storica, fuori dal tempo?

The name «grottesca», as Cellini explains in his autobiography, derives from the caves (grotte) on the Esquiline Hill in Rome, which were in fact nothing more than the underground remains of Nero's Domus Aurea discovered in 1480 and which immediately became popular with the painters of the time, who often made themselves descend into the caves not only to perform orgies, dances with skeletons, skinnings and lessons in Anatomy, but to finally meet the Muses and study the fantastical paintings found there. In fact, even the words mosaic, musive, museum, reveal theatrical surprises. It is not easy to establish the exact origin of the term 'mosaic': humans have always shown a natural inclination to decorate furnishings, spaces and architecture, using either pigments or stones already colorful from nature itself, or best of all, shells, bones and other fossils from the subsoil. The term mosaic itself is of uncertain origin: some say it comes from the Greek Μωσαϊκόν (musaikòn), «patient work worthy of the muses»; in Latin it was called opus musivum, i.e. «work of the muses» or «covering applied to caves dedicated to the muses themselves». The reference to the Muses is due to the ancient custom of building caves and alcoves in the gardens, vineyards and gardens of villas; decorating the interior walls with stones and shells they were dedicated to the Nymphs (Ninpheum) or the Muses (Musaeum).

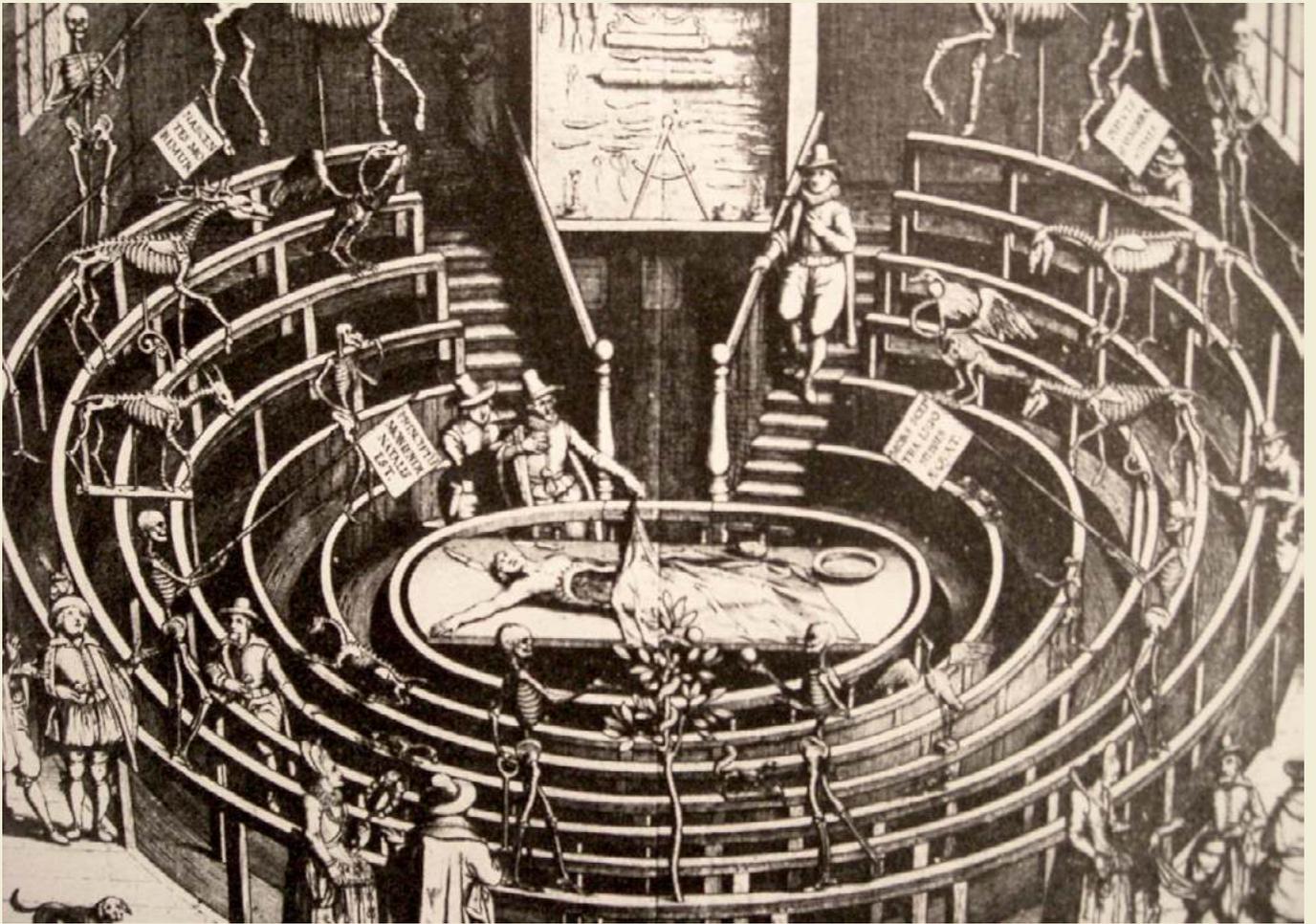
Thus musaeum or musivum indicates the cave and opus musaeum or opus musivum indicates the type of wall decoration. Later, the adjective musaicus was used to indicate the mosaic work. The term may also be derived from the Arabic muzauwaq مذوق meaning «mosaic» or DIKUR ديكور meaning «decoration».

Our position is undoubtedly that of listening, that of memory, that of reinstating research into the social role of the museum, not just following the flow of valorization. Perhaps the museum could find, as in the Temple of the Muses, in its hypogeal and mysterious «nature», a setting for anatomy lessons; perhaps the museum, by inhabiting it rather than merely visiting it, as in the case of the Metropoliz or the Macro Asilo in Rome, could come closer to life. Is the museum of contemporary art still aware of what we have written? Or is it entrenched behind a 'synchronic' role, obedient to the course of events dictated by capitalism, and in so doing, does the museum itself remain outside the stream of the historical analysis, outside of time?











Regina José Galindo



OCT. 2021

**JUAN JOSÉ LAHUERTA**

# The Empty Museum

The ‘Empty Museum’ could be the title of this lecture; for what is really the main characteristic of the hundreds of modern art museums that have been built in all our cities in recent years, if not that they are empty, absolutely and completely empty?

What I will try to explain, and hopefully demonstrate, is that this vacuity is the primary condition of a museum, perhaps the virtue or anti-virtue, if you can call it that, from which modern art benefits (and enjoys). The latter, in its criticism of the museum, nevertheless makes of it the repository, its bank - and I am referring to the classical museum - the place where the goods around which everything revolves are kept. Here everything takes on value, justifying its existence because the museum is the ‘federal reserve’ of modern art.

And like a bank, its plenitude is invisible in that it represents that which is invisible and that which cannot be seen. All the values of modern art are therefore opposed to its opaque emptiness of monolith or sphinx, and like the monolith or the sphinx - which are essential images of architecture (the one that, as Bataille said, turns man into an intermediate evolutionary step from ape to architecture) - the architecture of empty museums is architecture in itself, and, as such, nothing but architecture for architecture’s sake: an expression of the mysterious and sinister power

of emptiness.

So, let's start with what appears to be the first modern museum in the narrowest sense, the first public collection, founded in July 1793 in Paris by the Convention. Many will remember that only a few years after the birth of the Terror, the Convention itself decided to make of the terror its own peculiar policy, creating a sort of coincidence between the modern museum and the guillotine - to the extent that one could speculate on a relationship between the museum and the decapitating machine - or incidentally with the headless body. This is not another story, but for now we are going in another direction: one in which a class without a past, the bourgeoisie, appropriates the collections of the nobility and the church, and displays them publicly in the Grand Gallery of the Louvre which is no longer the king's palace. This happened despite having absolutely no sense of the collection. The Grand Gallery of the Louvre, an imposing and exaggeratedly linear architecture, is in fact a decisive element in the foundation of this very sense, and of the museum's significance.

Who came first, the chicken or the egg, then? In other words: first the linear, extended space of that gallery covered by a continuous barrel vault, or the decision to line up the paintings, one after the other? Paintings of all kinds (mythological paintings, historical paintings, religious paintings, still life, landscapes and portraits) which are organized according to insignificant criteria, such as the size. What came first then? Whatever the answer, the first catalogues were quickly published so as to imaginatively catalogue the collection's treasures, and, within a few years, the expropriations of which the aristocracy and the church were the privileged victims were followed by generous tributes in art arriving from all over Europe - courtesy of Napoleon's robberies, looting and raids. And from these deeds of

plundering and destruction, from the thefts and spoils of war systematically undertaken by the Empire in the conquered lands, originate, beyond doubt, the modern criteria of the Schools: the different 'Italian' schools, the 'Spanish' school, the 'Dutch' school, the 'Flemish' school, etc.

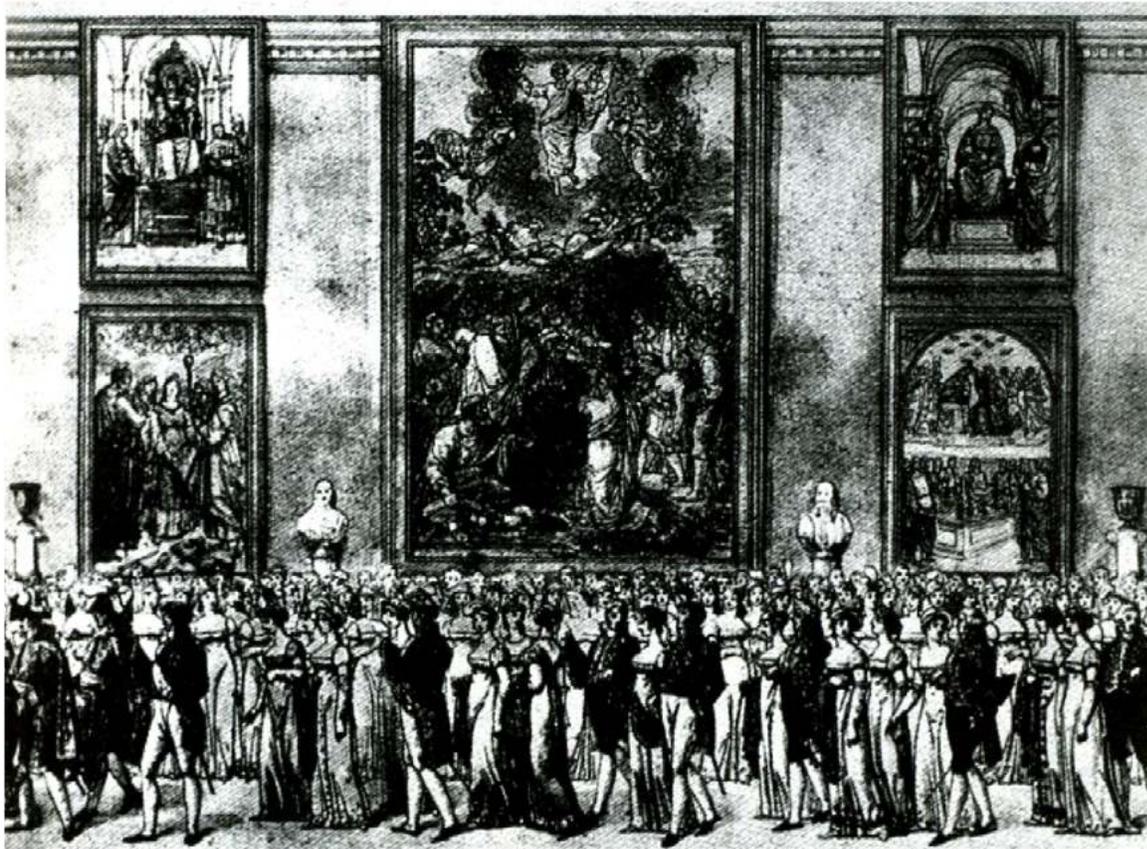
As early as 1799 - only five years later - it was decided to organise the Louvre gallery in chronological order and according to the so-called schools, so that the museum, the gallery and the linear layout that identifies them would define, through a given architecture, all the criteria for understanding, or rather using, the works of art, now no longer intended to be viewed individually (as they were previously thought of in the hall of a palace or the chapel of a church), but as part of a great universal movement, that of History. This great invisible character who had his reason - and how could he have!) and whose extremities led to an ever-delayed conclusion whose metaphor can be found in the linearity of that first gallery. A History that begins and ends in that museum transformed for the occasion into a straight line between an entrance door and an exit door. The Gallery, therefore, and the museum as a gigantic, linear gallery, are a sort of a universal space, conceived as a vertiginous image of History. It is no coincidence that in these long perspectives things happen, one after the other, that were originally created individually to be enjoyed individually; and not to be part of History. Infinite perspectives of infinite length and infinite wonder, here's how the museum eliminates the work of art and inaugurates art as History. By paraphrasing Susan Sontag, in those galleries, narrative and hermeneutic analysis replace eroticism.

When we look at some of the images, engravings, paintings or drawings that represent the gallery of the Louvre, of what was first called the Museum of the Nation and then the

## THE EMPTY MUSEUM - JUAN JOSE LAHUERTA

Napoleon Museum, we can only be impressed by the audience's gestures, by the attitudes, by the relationships that we discover between the people - who have become the public - and the things on display. In other words, by the way things are expressed in the very long space of this 'universal exhibition' of History that is the museum. All this identity, specular and spectacular - I repeat it - is impressive.

how five paintings hang on the wall, perfectly arranged according to size and theme and, of course, according to the progress of the Masters and the schools to which they are linked. Note that the two paintings at the top, on the sides, are works by Perugino. They depict virgins with saints arranged symmetrically under the vaults of an architecture that closes in a perfect perspective cube.



Let us look, for example, at this drawing by Benjamin Zix, in which the procession of guests at the wedding of Napoleon and Marie-Louise moves through the Great Gallery towards the Salon Carré where the altar and the couple's throne are installed. Zix has chosen a frontal view that allows us to see

Below, on either side, are two works by Raffaello Sanzio, the style of which may be linked to his presumed apprenticeship in the workshop of Perugino. In this arrangement, they give the impression that that moment has been instantly surpassed, painted in the time it takes to glance at the gallery wall on

## VOICE OVER

which they hang. Perugino's appear as an earlier, primitive and preparatory period in the movement of History. Here, Saint Cecilia on our left and the Ascension of the Virgin on our right, with its spatial audacity, with its diagonals, with its naturalness («O grazia graziosissima», as Vasari would say), with its naturalistic perfection, both come from Perugino, but they move to another place, a place of even greater perfection.

That place is represented by the main painting in the centre, around which the others revolve: the Transfiguration, the culmination of the Roman Raffaello, according to history, who definitively leaves behind the fifteenth century to open the doors to the sixteenth. Towards who knows what or who: Caravaggio, the Baroque, and so on... but in the Gallery, of course, each of these masterpieces stop being self-sufficient to become the model or the surpassing of something else, the past and the future, all in a majestic triptych.

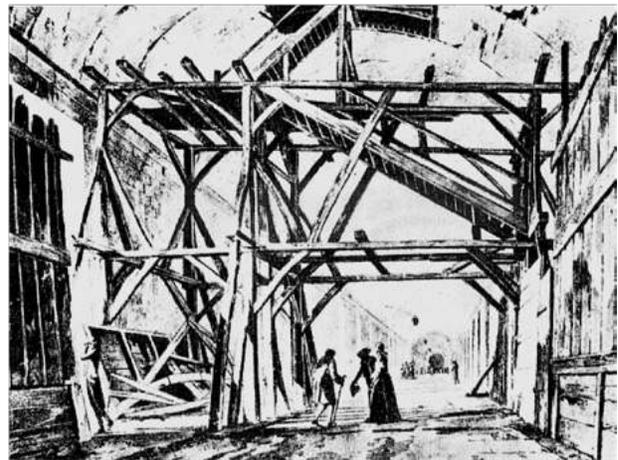
This, of course, is not all. Notice how those strips of paint that go from the ceiling to the frame, and to the heads of the audience, are rhythmically separated, as if they were photographs - allow me this anachronism - from those other strips of wall with those busts and vases that, like pivots, serve to punctuate them. They actually serve to mark the rhythm, like an infinite rhythmic traversal that, of course, ultimately becomes the assembly line of History. It is exactly as happens in Alexander Sokurov's magnificent two-hour long sequence shot *The Russian Ark*, filmed at the Hermitage: the procession following the emperor advances in a single direction along the gallery, towards the climax of that History.

The ceremonial procession of this Napoleonic wedding therefore follows the path, and the rhythm, of the history of art, of the more than one thousand paintings in this gallery; and some of the visitors, or guests, not only were amazed by the number of people making up the procession, but, as in Friedrich Schlegel, by what cannot be separated from the great procession of the people: the great procession of paintings!

Schlegel said that the gallery of the Napoleonic Museum could follow step by step the - and I quote - 'gradual evolution of a great artistic spirit'. The procession for the procession, the gradual evolution that makes one correspond to the other. Just as in the Napoleonic wars the emperor's soldiers flagged his passage through Europe, here the paintings signal the passage of the new public into the museum-gallery: in perfect unison and compact. The 'individual' work of art has disappeared: the museum shows the history of which each work is merely a compulsory step in its gradual evolution... but in what direction?

The museum, which is completely full, seems to have been emptied of everything solid to fill itself with that element in which everything dissolves: History. But what better image of a beautiful building than one that gives shape to a gallery? What better image of the chain-of-assembly-of-history-of-art than a tunnel?

But the disturbing analogy between the imperial soldiers crossing Europe and the guests of the emperor's wedding procession passing through the gallery of the Louvre is not the only one in this collection of images.



In this other one, an engraving by Constant Bourgeois - showing us the great gallery of the Louvre

## THE EMPTY MUSEUM - JUAN JOSE LAHUERTA

in 1791, at a time when it was being prepared to be opened to the public even before the Convention officially declared the National Museum to be founded - we see the long perspective we already know unfolding in the background, and, in the foreground, a wooden scaffold erected to carry out restoration work and to prepare the walls and vault of the gallery to house the paintings, and perhaps also to hang the paintings on those walls. This scaffolding seems to adapt to the curved shape of the vault to create a modular depth, a kind of section that can be repeated towards the bottom along the entire perspective of the gallery. It is not difficult to imagine, looking at the wooden grating that occupies this end of the gallery, and the perspective of the gallery itself (and imagining this structure moving towards the bottom, almost sliding like a wagon on rails along which the workers will line up in a clear historical perspective) the paintings. The metaphor of the 'train of history' is not a recent one; but how can we forget that Robida, the great mid-XIX-century comedian, announced that in the future, in Paris, visits to the Louvre would be made from the carriages of a tram. And so the feeling of depth, of uninterrupted fugue, is exactly what the engravings of this national or Napoleonic gallery convey.

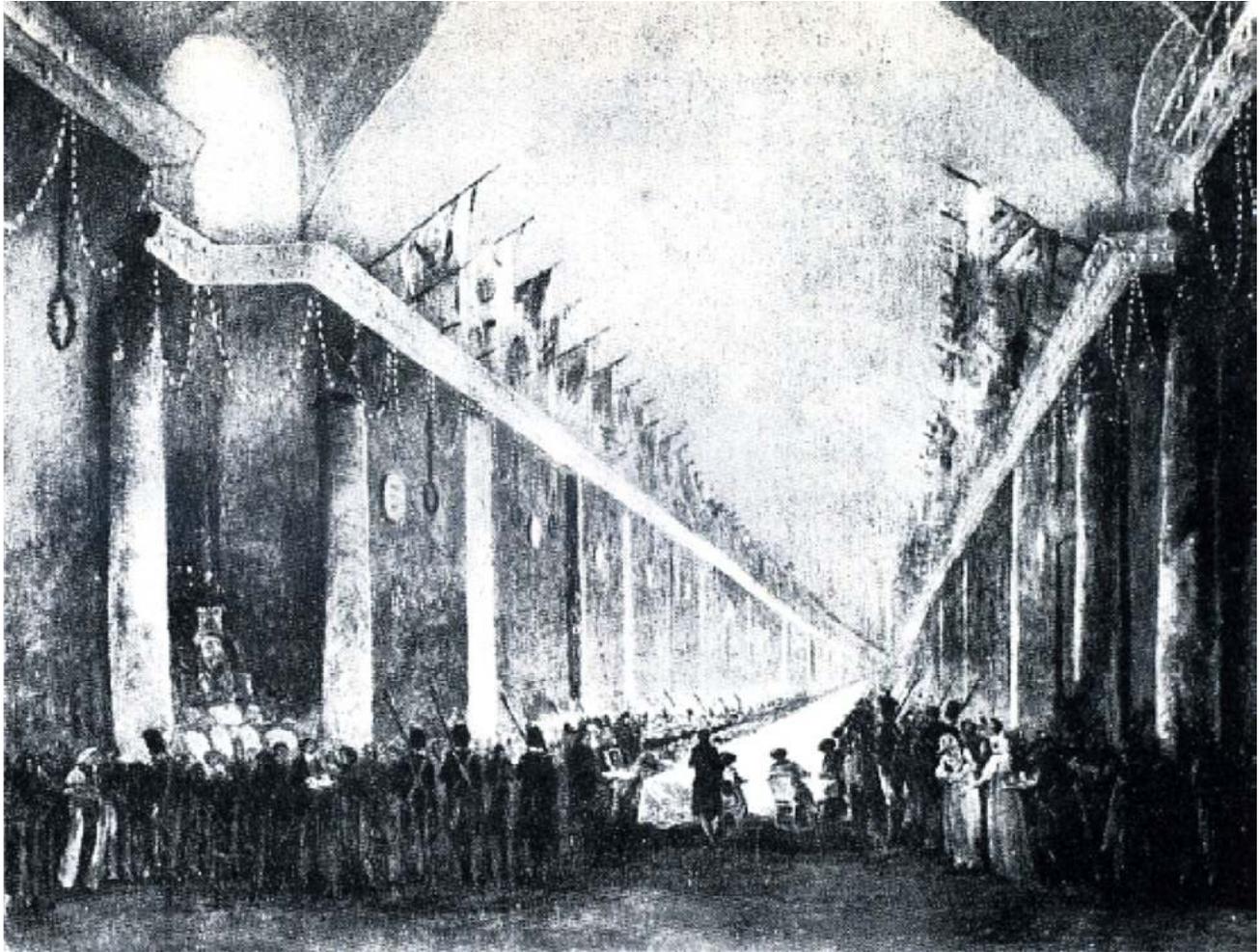


**«It is exactly as happens in Alexander Sokurov's magnificent two-hour long sequence shot - The Russian Ark - filmed at the Hermitage: the procession following the emperor advances in a single direction along the gallery, towards the climax of that History.»**

## VOICE OVER

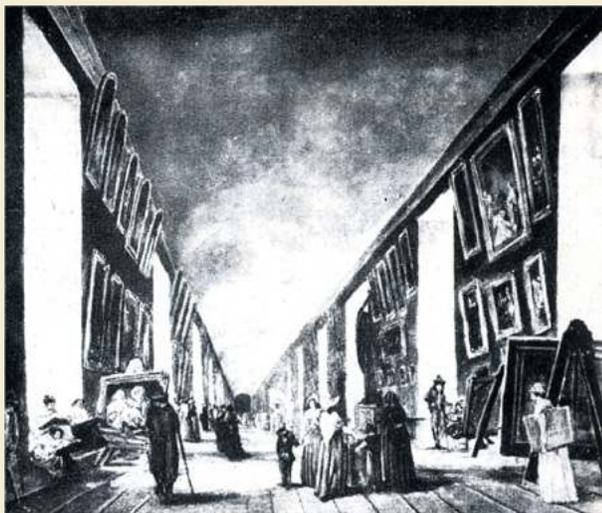
This is what happens, for example, as in so many others, in this drawing by Hubert Robert depicting the great banquet of 20 December 1797 in the Louvre gallery. The lines of the frames and the large white surface of the table end at a very distant point. They slide towards the bottom of what seems to be a didactic representation of

the perspective mechanism of long straight lines and parallels rhythmically counterpointed by the canvases on the walls and the hollows of the balconies, by the garlands of decoration (which introduce a further, superimposed and more cadenced rhythm).



**«So we might believe that Duchamp pays in nature: through one of his works, namely a work of art. But this is not how aesthetic judgment works, and contrary to what happens with a work of art, here value and price seem to coincide; at least in the amount, it is said to be worth \$115, the price of a dentist's service.»**

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This same place, finally transformed into a painting gallery, cannot function very differently from what it did for that banquet. In fact, another drawing by Hubert Robert, dated 1796, and therefore earlier, shows us the extraordinarily rigid and taut frames that are to be found in the dark and distant cavity at the back of the gallery, without interruptions and with the walls punctuated only by the luminous rectangles of the windows, with the vault transformed into a sort of immaterial sky, without form or shadow, and with the paintings tilted towards the centre of the gallery like flags, as if prefiguring the curved line of the vault, the keystone of the vault that unites the two walls in a single plane. The paintings are angled outwards to attract the attention of visitors who, perfectly parallel to the tilt of the paintings themselves, with their suggestive gestural projection, will no doubt have to twist their necks considerably to observe them as they move back and forth in the gallery, or glide along the straight path of History.

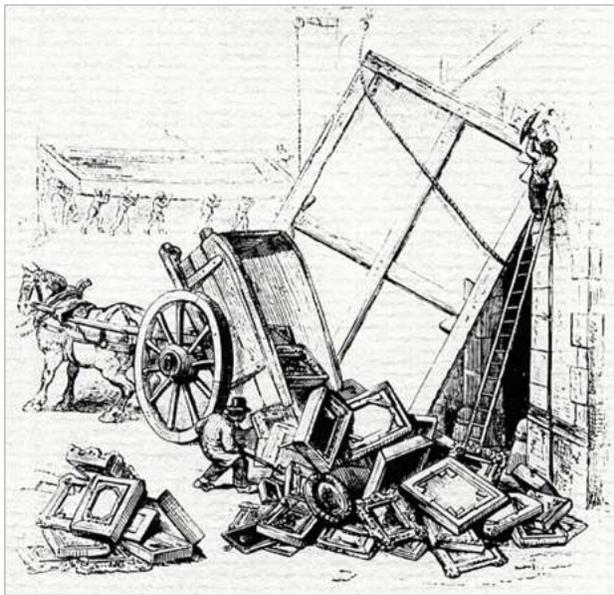
Another painting by Constant Bourgeois, dated 1799, seems to insist even more on this suggestion. The small paintings have been placed in the lower part and the large ones in the upper part, as if expressly defying a law of gravity that

seems to be satisfied nowhere else: the fanlights cut into the vault increase the feeling of tilting as hollow heads approaching, like the praying heads of Millet's angelus. While the four columns, transformed into disproportionate pedestals for the four small busts they are meant to support, further dramatize with their verticality, in an opposite direction, the tilt of the paintings, which now seem to simply announce the collapse of the walls. In this endless succession of portraits of kings, nobles, martyrs and saints; in this endless succession of announcements, ascensions, transfigurations, sacred conversations, each painting disappears among the multitude of paintings, sinking into the public collection, or sinks into the very concept of public collection, of the national gallery. The paintings are tilted almost to the point of dragging the walls themselves with them, and finally to endanger the visitor. Like goods suspended from their intended purpose in market windows or on the street, the paintings, at the appearance of History, gesticulate and shout uselessly to draw attention to their singular presence; but, joining their shouting to all the shouting, they only succeed in increasing the amount of shouting, which is eventually confused with silence and absence, and thus becomes interchangeable with this very silence and absence.

## VOICE OVER

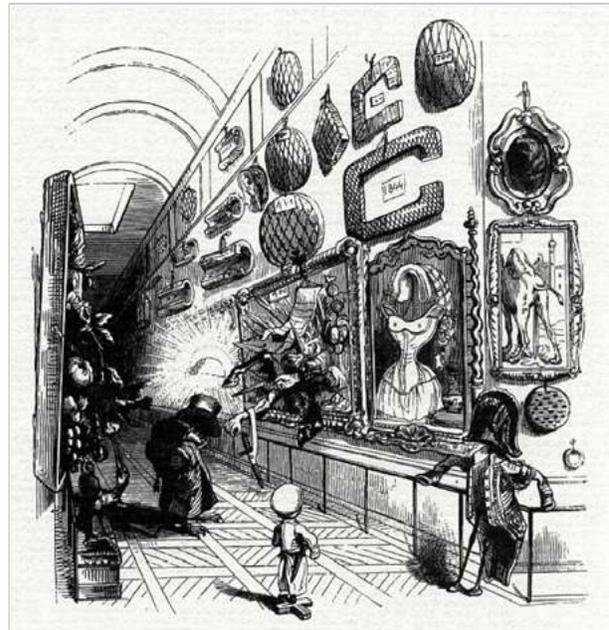
After all, as we have already said, this collection, like so many others, or most of them, is nothing more than the fruit of plunder, of the spoils of war. The 'singular' work, namely the work of art, should have been - and often has been - the fruit of love; but also the bond of history, namely nothing more than a document. And, as Benjamin said, a document of barbarism.

But let's talk about the danger that this collapse, this gesticulating projection, this shouting, represents for the little visitor. In his great book of 1844, *Un Autre Monde*, Grandville devotes a chapter to what he calls 'The Louvre of the Puppets'. In one of the illustrations, we therefore see how the paintings are dumped on the museum door, which has to be demolished to allow the entry of the work of one of those masters who, according to Grandville, are used to measuring genius with a palette. The museum thus also seems to be the home of quantity.



Much more famous is this other illustration, in which we see how the images come out of their frames, go out of themselves, to attract the attention of those empty visitors, without flesh,

only jackets and hats, pure tokens, as goods of the 'kingdom of puppets', whose activity is supplanted by the images themselves. In the background, a rising sun seems ready to blind all eyes, on the left the fruit and vegetables of an overflowing still life as in the most abundant market stalls, pecked by birds; on the right, art in deshabillé and the muse in a comb; in the centre, the



big picture of History, a battle: what a fight, what a hurricane, what a trumpet, what a whirlwind. Furious heads, threatening weapons, sabres and swords, everything lives, comes out of the canvas, and fights. Grandville rightly writes that, to avoid accidents, they would do well to prevent visitors from approaching this canvas. But, after all, what is this battle if not the battle of goods? Aren't we attacked every day by the market, by its advertising? Paintings, like things, have been moved from their natural place - let's say - and collected in a reserve justified on scientific grounds. Deportation and concentration of individual works of art in order to make them speak outside themselves: just say those words - displacement, deportation, concentration, reserve - and

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we already know that we are talking about our barbarity.

A new image of this founding gallery, also by Hubert Robert, from 1796, shows us one of the many plans to light it from the vault. Not only that, it also shows us how they planned to cut the longitudinal space by means of arches enclosing smaller spaces, more enclosed rooms. The zenithal light, the crypt, they will have thought, would undoubtedly allow not only to obtain a light more suitable for the contemplation of the paintings, a diffused light evoking that of the artist's studio; but it would transform that gallery into something like a crypt, a pantheon illuminated by the oculus, a new Domus aurea in which to find a grotesque truth that history has in any case already swept away.

In the same year, 1796, Hubert Robert himself depicted his gallery project as an ancient ruin: a desperate invocation of a prestige, that of time, that of antiquity, which the museum gallery unconditionally cancels. History is always new, always progressing, it is always a gallery or a tunnel. History, unlike time, has no children, and because it is timeless, it does not belong to time. The Louvre in ruins is nothing other than the dream of prestige that the Louvre, the place of the timeless reserve of art invested with its History, cannot have. All art is thus invested with the institution of History, and the museum is the bank of art, the crypt in which its virtues are no longer accumulated, but rather its values. The parallel story of the Louvre gallery and the galleries of goods, both leading to a cave, could not be more pertinent.

Another image, from 1819, by Archer. It shows the first arrangement of the marbles in the Parthenon of the British Museum, where they had arrived, as we know, after being removed from their original place by Lord Elgin a few years earlier, starting in 1801.





Staff of the British Museum and British Library surround Benjamin West, President of the Royal Academy, seated in the centre. On the wall, as if they were paintings, we see hanging some of the metopes with the battles of the Lapiths and the Centaurs; further down, we see how the frieze of the Panathenaic processions fits the curves of the walls; and in the centre of the room, between the knights' black robes, the two illuminated white marbles of the bodies of the gods that once occupied the pediment; still further down, directly on the floor, the marvellous head of the horse that used to pull the moon chariot.

One might think that this arrangement is very different from that of the works in the great Louvre gallery, and it certainly is. The light seems to be responsible for creating a more secluded atmosphere, and the familiar proximity of these men to the marbles is reminiscent, or intended to be reminiscent, of that of some classic collector's cabinets, and not the aggressive distance from a modern public museum as we have described it in the Louvre gallery. In reality, there is nothing of the sort. These marbles were placed on mobile pedestals with wheels that

allowed them to be moved around the room in search of the best lighting for when artists came to copy them. In other words, what had been done with them - tearing them from the Parthenon, crumbling them, dismembering them, moving them - continued in that continuous and offensive rolling on wheels. Wheels like those of the scaffolding that runs through the gallery of the Louvre, wheels that allow us to see those marbles in absolute strangeness, in absolute and definitive exile. And let us not mention, of course, how they have been arranged, since the late 1920s, in the Duveen Gallery: gallery

again, after all. All the flesh of the Parthenon, whose bare bones remain in Athens, is revolting in its own grave.

What interests me is to point out, as others have already done, a not so strange coincidence. In 1817, Lord Elgin's marbles were exhibited for the first time at the British Museum. Just one hundred years later, in 1917, Duchamp presented a work entitled *Fountain* at the New York Society of Independent Artists' exhibition. In that double shift, in that double suspension, is contained, or contracted, the history of the modern museum. Lord Elgin tears up the Parthenon marbles and takes them to London, where, far from themselves, they are displayed as masterpieces. Duchamp buys a urinal in a sanitary shop, names it 'fountain', dates it, signs it and exhibits it as a masterpiece by an artist called R. Mutt. No wonder that, shortly afterwards, in 1920, Duchamp becomes the first curator of the first 'museum' of modern art - no paradoxes there; no wonder either that this 'museum' is called 'Anonymous Society'.

In the first case, that of Lord Elgin, we see more clearly than in any other example how

the ancient gods are transformed into magnificent - it is true - but simple sculptures; in the second, that of Duchamp, which, however much it is spoken of in terms of provocation, is in reality nothing more than an extreme continuation or step towards the limit of the first (and what else can all civil servant artists do other than childishly repeat this supposed provocation as the sole purpose of their art?). The urinal in the Museum of Modern Art is the radical exploitation, the logical continuation, of the Parthenon marbles in the British Museum; the step, bordering on the fictional, common to both romanticism, rationalism and the avant-garde, of an autonomous art separated from the world of the sacred, morality and collective (or rather, social) taste and thus transformed into an end in itself. There is no god, no prince, no state, not even what was so amusing to Offenbach: public opinion. So what is left for art if not the museum? That work suspended in itself, and, at the same time, outside itself, has only one place to exist, the place where showing is consecrated, and where the only value is the exhibition value: the museum, in fact.

Chosen artwork, proclaimed artwork, exhibited artwork. Duchamp's urinal would not exist as a work of art - or rather, simply, as art - if there were no space reserved for art in which even aesthetic judgments have disappeared, and in which all values have been replaced by the one the value of the exhibition. Much more than any painting by Perugino or Raphael, who were, and still are, quite happy to sit in that dark chapel for which they were painted, and in front of which one can still see something more than a painting - namely a singular work of art, with all the power of a work of art - much more than that kind of painting, which, in any case, has been massively moved to museums, the urinal needs the museum, and cannot prescind from it. Out-

side of that protected environment it would be a urinal, quite simply. The urinal is the ultimate museum art. But an empty museum, of course. Correct me if I'm wrong: the urinal was bought by Arensberg, a collector, with a blank cheque, albeit nominal and made out to R. Mutt, so that it could not be cashed immediately. Arensberg's blank cheque was followed in Duchamp's career by another pair of cheques. In 1919, Duchamp paid Daniel Tzank, his dentist, with a cheque written by himself in the exquisitely crafted handwriting of an annalist, an amanuensis from the Sainte Geneviève library. The cheque, thus filled in, is useless. So we might believe that Duchamp pays in nature: through one of his works, namely a work of art. But this is not how aesthetic judgement works, and contrary to what happens with a work of art, here value and price seem to coincide; at least in the amount, it is said to be worth \$115, the price of a dentist's service.

Duchamp is not giving a work of art as a gift to a connoisseur who appreciates it beyond its price, i.e. who appreciates its beauty, but to someone who knows the price, and above all the potential price of Duchamp's signature, which, after all, as in any amount of a cheque, is what gives value to that amount as well, attributed, as Duchamp wrote, in relation to the Company of the Loan of Teeth and the Confidence Acquired. It is this trust that allows us to appreciate the potential price of the cheque: its speculative value. No one here can talk about a work of art, any more or less than one can talk about a urinal; except, of course, in terms of art history, or art theory, or, better still, art economics.

Years go by. In 1965 Duchamp organised a retrospective. There are the urinal and the check, which he himself bought back from his dentist for over £115. Trust works. A collector attending the opening, Phillip Bruno, asked Duchamp for

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an autograph and, cunningly, presented him with a blank chequebook to sign. Duchamp writes him the cheque for an unlimited amount of dollars, and writes it out to the Bank of the Mona Lisa. The financial artist who is Duchamp, the artist who does not work, who speculates (thus making conceptual art) implants all his values in relation to the artist-craftsman Leonardo. The counter-altar to the Mona Lisa is the Louvre, of course, the museum par excellence, the reserve that must be preserved, the vault where the values are kept in relation to which, in art, everything can revolve. Or nothing at all.

**In 1911, when the Mona Lisa was stolen from the Louvre, people queued long enough to see nothing but this: a hole with several attachments, the ones the painting had been hanging from until then. An empty museum...**

A strange and paradoxical theme, then, is the one of the architecture of the so-called modern art museum, or, excuse me, of contemporary art - so that history continues to set the pace. The hysteria, as happened in that photo of the battle of Grandville, of what museums are necessarily about these days, what they house, what they display, how and to whom they are directed... Because, in reality, it is difficult to find another more immediate and more schematic example of the distance between the work and its display, or, more properly, between the work itself and the paths of its consumption, than the one represented by constantly renewed museums, venerable museums continually updated on their development, striking until exhaustion, and empty until devastation.

In them we see clearly how - and to what extent - the work must be hidden in order to obtain, shall we say, benefits from it. The more the work is hidden under the impenetrable security measures that guarantee its preservation, the less it can be seen and enjoyed, the more its image, its infinite reproduction, will extend to the other side: postcards, notebooks, diaries, calendars, scarves, ties, pins, souvenirs, bibelots and bagatelles of all kinds...

The more his illustrations multiply, the less one sees the work; the more his figure is consumed, the less one spends; the more his replicas spread everywhere, the less chance there is to have fun - which, of course, hidden in the darkness of his secure retirement, veiled by conservatives, technicians, and replicas is the guarantee for all contemporary art, starting with the urinal, for an infinite bond. So one might say that the democratization of art - tourist trips, buses, a public that pays to be distracted... - automatically presupposes its requisition, its confinement to the bottom of a safe - which is the necessary (and sufficient) condition for its effectiveness. The cellars of the Mona Lisa are full of treasures: reserve funds, Ali Baba's caves.

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I am not going to talk about the comforting fiction that would be the typology of the modern museum - that is, the empty museum - and even less about that of the museum of the future. In 1911, when the Mona Lisa was stolen from the Louvre, people queued long enough to see nothing but this: a hole with several attachments, the ones the painting had been hanging from until then. An empty museum, a container for a distracted clientele that wants to be distracted; a place for leisure and cloudy Sundays. Radical image, that hole, of the modern museum which, in its search for the pantheon, has found a cenotaph. The architecture of the museum can already be, like any architecture, anything. ()

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# **MANUEL BORJA-VILLET**

Director of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía since January 2008

A zoom conversation with David Liver

***ON THE POSITIONED MUSEUM, BUILDING NEW NARRATIVES  
AND AFFECTIVE COMMUNITIES, THE MUSEUM AS A COMMON***

<https://vimeo.com/635705834>

*VOICE OVER*



# **GREGORY SHOLETTE**

**An interview about  
institutions and values**

By Florent Delval

You recently wrote an article about NFTs. They could be a powerful tool for artists that aren't operating in the art world's centers, but their value was legitimated by one of the most powerful auction houses. Did NFTs offer the same promises as digital video cameras, the internet, cryptocurrencies offered at first?

There is an interesting repetition taking place today involving the promise of the NFT/Non-Fungible Token in relation to earlier forms of artistic reproduction technology. Claims for its transformative potential resemble many previous assurances about the imminent democratization of art itself. Here we can site consumer grade camcorders in the mid-1980s, and before this, the so-called audio cassette swap culture of the 1970s, but also the entire history of lens-based imaging starting all the way back in the mid-19th century, a development that a hundred years later, Walter Benjamin famously interpreted in 1936 as the emancipation of objects from their aura of immediacy. This historic rupture released the image from its signified, but also allowed it to become infinitely reproducible. Benjamin saw this as “the most significant achievement of the latest school of photography.” But this shift also allowed images to become “fungible” on a certain level, thus shareable with others. This potentially radical interchangeability is also what digital technology once held-out as its fundamental gift. And once social networks were truly established in the 1990s, digitalization offered anyone an inexpensive means of gifting or bartering work to others including such things as electronically encoded imagery, music, texts, data and so forth. Notably, these shareables include things that someone has produced themselves, but also things that they have appropriated from the ever-expanding archive of cyberspace.

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Internet or cryptocurrencies were associated at first with an image of freedom. It was a playground for anarchists experimentations. But was there such a golden age of NFT? Also it seemed that NFT was never really popular before it was recently hijacked by brands, auction houses and stars. Are we facing faster cycles of technologies? Or even faster cycles of art paradigms?

I think you really put your keypad down on it: the underlying issue is the acceleration of value and its rapid circulation, though not just in terms of works of art and their spiraling prices, but anything that intersects with the global marketplace, which today means just about everything, from objects to ideas to emotions and experiences. The challenge is how to reconcile the idea of making art with its long history of durational time as an embedded quality the viewer values. I mean, think of the intricately layered paintings of Venetian artist's Titian or Tintoretto, or reflect on the numerous meditative hours of collective labor that Sol LeWitt's Wall Drawings demand. This is why I find the recent 69.3 million dollar Christies' sale of Beeple's NFT «EVERYDAYS: THE FIRST 5000 DAYS» so paradoxical.

On one hand, it's really just a hyper-mashup of smaller jpgs, one made every day for 5000 days running. And we can actually test the truth claims made by the artist whose real name is Mike Winkelmann, because the ledger of their production is encrypted in the NFT itself. OK, fine, but here is the curious part. What the buyer of Beeple's NFG says he was allegedly drawn to was not its visual qualities at all, in fact Vignesh Sundaresan (aka "MetaKovan") has publicly stated that "techniques are replicable and skill is surpassable." Wow. If I were Mr. Beeple I would feel more than a little deflated. Instead, what MetaKovan insists he purchased for such a large sum is «time,» the only thing that «you can't hack digitally.»<sup>1</sup>

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1- see: Jacob Kastrenakes, "A Secretive Metaverse Creator Bought the \$69 million Beeple NFT," The Verge, March 12, 2021: <https://www.theverge.com/2021/3/12/22327594/metakovan-beeple-highest-auction-price-69-million-nft>

In other words, the buyer was allegedly most attracted to the aesthetic of labor time that this NFT has encapsulated uniquely within its digital coding. Its paradoxical to me because on the one hand we are discussing the incredible speeds of networked technology, while also acknowledging a seemingly «Luddite» admiration, if not fetishization, for slow, durational time, a quality that is not only precisely opposite the notion of rapid acceleration, but is in fact a phenomenon that so-called “labor saving” applications such as digitalization, cellular networks and the Internet, were invented to help overcome.

Usually, what determines the value of an artwork? It's neither the rarity, nor the artist's technical skills, nor the time spent... As for you, success became the motor of success itself : an oeuvre is valuable when it detaches itself from the «dark matter», the mass. A collector buys a name and the storytelling associated with that name, so s.he buys a brand. Do we agree so far? So what does it mean when suddenly an unknown/random artist becomes one of the most expensive, based on criteria that were not so relevant some time ago? Are we entering a new paradigm of value? Why now? Determined by what?

With respect. Florent, I think I would put this differently by asking what is the difference between the value of a given work, and its art-industry pricing as reflected by auction records or market statistics. Do these differ? Or are they congruent? Of course, the problem becomes immediately apparent. Whether or not we agree with the market-based “price” of a given art work, the number is quantifiable. I will elaborate in a second. But the other factor of its value, well, what is that? When we are speaking of art, value remains elusive, or at least unsettled. Nevertheless, as art economist Olav Velthuis and others have shown, the price of an artwork expresses a double signification in so far as it both indexes the market value of a specific item, and simultaneously signals its quality as “art.” But then, doesn't price always have a symbolic dimension? I mean, regardless if we are talking about art or some other commodity, there is a social signification involved, and even more so when the object is perceived to be something that exceeds mere use value.

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For instance, a car takes us from point A to B while conserving our personal physical energy (although of course, automobiles indirectly consume and exude carbon-based fuels that have other social and environmental costs). But, if we were evaluating a specific, expensively, manufactured automobile, say the 1953 Fiat Cabriolet that sold at auction for over a million Euro in 2015, then we could take apart the sale price and see that it is determined by several factors including the singularity of the item (Fiat produced very few autos with V8 or “Otto Vu” engines inside <https://rmsothebys.com/en/auctions/ve15/villa-erba/lots/r115-1953-fiat-8v-cabriolet-by-vignale/180373> ), the specificity of the particular car’s designer (Alfredo Vignale), and the ledger of ownership, or its provenance in other words. If someone famous purchased it in the past, then my ownership feels even more valorized. In this sense, your right, the “motor” of the object’s increasing worth becomes virtually tautological as each auction success is premised on the success of past auction results. Let’s call this the “buzz” that hovers around an object (or name, or brand, or service).

The actual usefulness of the Fist is irrelevant here. but this buzz is only important to an interested community who share, spread and amplify it, like a group of collectors competing for items with limited stock, or more broadly, members of an interested public who express amazement at the extravagant cost of this recent Beeple NFT, though of course, they will be amazed all over again by the next wild art world pricing record that shatters. The buzz is used in the first example as a means of establishing price, but in the second instance buzz is consumed as entertainment, especially by those not in a position to monetize its message.

A traditionalist would likely dismiss this analysis as reductive or even cynical, pointing out that “art” is either a.) a historic human institution that carries forward with it deeper values and narratives than can never be fully expressed by mere prices at an auction, thus a car is not “art,” no matter how unique or aesthetically designed; or b.) art is ontologically

an expression or embodiment of human freedom, inspiration, self-directed labor, aesthetic improvisation and so forth, again, qualities that cannot be exhausted by notions of market value. By contrast, my dark matter thesis (Pluto Press, 2011) sought to appropriate and invert the last argument about freed labor time, by refocusing our attention on the artistic value in everyday acts of imagination, creative distraction, fantasy, pleasure, or even non-productive withdrawal from the unfreedom of having to generate “value” for the marketplace.

Three examples stand out. First, the work of amateur artists, typically dismissed by the “serious” art world. Second, the labor of that vast invisible army of professional artists who serve to reproduce the art industry while remaining in its margins and shadows -people with MFAs, BFAs, and art PhDs- many of whom still practice art, but are employed as art handlers, fabricators, studio assistants, arts administrators etc. And then, there is a third category, those artists who actually withdrew from the marketplace for political or economic reasons, or even out of a certain stubborn self-respect. This last group includes activist artists who seek to upend the way art is made and understood, including challenging its social uselessness.

These are the three species of artistic dark matter, if you like, that I focus on in some of my writings (for an overview of these ideas I recommend this short essay: [Swampwalls Dark Matter and the Lumpen Army of Art](#) (2008), but the key point of my revisionist, bottom-up artworld *mise en scene* is that all three categories began emerging out of the shadows into the light a couple of decades ago, thanks to both the spreading networking and sharing capacity of the Internet, but also because post-industrial, neoliberal capitalism actively seeks to extract monetizable value (there is that word again) out of every last drop of our existence, including these previously darkened spaces where culture was being generated without the necessary validation of galleries, markets, or art world gatekeepers.

I began writing and publishing these ideas in 1999. By now, the notion that someone who calls what they do “art crap,” as Beeple describes his own practice (<https://www.beeple-crap.com/>) , or that a group of Black Lives Matter

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street demonstrators struggling for justice can all be appreciated as “art” is not so far-fetched. It is in fact becoming commonplace. Indeed, BLM was listed as the top “Power 100” art influencer of 2020 by the journal ArtReview <https://artreview.com/power-100/> .

The story doesn’t end there, however, because this validation of dark matter is not without paradox or conflict. Perhaps we are even at a point where a calculated return to the shadows, or what Kuba Szreder calls a “productive withdrawal,” is a tactic worth evaluating if we hope to salvage the notion of value, as opposed to mere price? <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/87/168899/productive-withdrawals-art-strikes-art-worlds-and-art-as-a-practice-of-freedom/> Or maybe we need to rush forward into the naked illumination of this bare, neoliberal art world in order to fulminate its collapse? In any case, I don’t think art is being valorized differently than it has been under capitalism for hundreds of years, I think the paradigm change taking place today involves what art “is”.

**Can we still expect something from NFTs? A parallel market? That would grant some freedom? Can we expect some new strategies of resistance from there?**

Regarding the NFT phenomenon today: it will take a very strong willed and highly focused campaign to assure that these new digital artworks generate an alternate, and most important, a sustainable P2P art economy. We have seen all of this attempted before, and vanish before. For instance, from 2008 to about 2011, Anton Vidokle, and Julieta Aranada of eFlux sought to build a local art-based currency for a project they simply called Time/Bank (which is the standard label for such alternative economic experiments). The bills they circulated were even designed by Conceptualist Lawrence Weiner. How cool is that? All in all it was very engaging, and also symbolically impressive, but practically speaking, it evaporated from sight almost faster than it took to develop in the first place. <https://www.abronsartscenter.org/on-view/exhibits/timebank-timefood/>

\* This is only one instance of such alternate economic projects artists have been involved with including:

Oliver Ressler's work starting back in 2003 [https://www.ressler.at/alternative\\_economics/](https://www.ressler.at/alternative_economics/)

A 2006 program that Carin Kunoï organized for the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at the New School IN NYC entitled Taking Back the Dollar» Alternative Economics: <https://veralistcenter.org/events/taking-back-the-dollar-alternative-economics/>  
<http://www.gregorysholette.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Alternative-Economy-Art-Panel.pdf>

The continuing witty economic interventions of Paolo Cirio <https://www.paolocirio.net/>

## **VOICE OVER**

Or the traveling exhibition Oliver Ressler and I organized based on Slavoj Žižek's phrase «It's The Political Economy, Studpid» first for the Austrian Cultural Forum in NYC, and then at many other venues between 2012 and 2016: <http://www.gregorysholette.com/itpes/>

So, if the past is any guide to where things go next, then yes, we can expect efforts to be made at reimagining the art world in the form of a more equitable system, but also as a challenge the naked monetization of art, however, we will also certainly have to accept that without fundamental political and economic change more broadly speaking, that is to say well-beyond the realm of high culture, artistic projects, created with or without NFTs, in which artists seek to establish alternative or gift economies, will continue to appear and disappear again, like fireflies in the waning days of a hot summer.

**In this context of acceleration, where the concept of artistic value is uncertain, what role should museums and similar cultural institutions play if any? Can they still guarantee the sustainability of an artwork?**

To admit that artists today have an especially complicated relationship with museums would be an understatement. Black artists, Indigenous artists, women artists, as well as all artists of color and their allies have focused on their systemic, historical exclusion through museum boycotts and interventions, critical letters sent to museum directors and boards of trustees, along with tactical withdrawals of art work. Protests also include demands that museum's discontinue funding from the fossil fuel, opioid, and weapons producing industries. while calls to decolonize museums targets racially insensitive businesses and individuals actively violating labor laws and human rights both at home and

abroad. Meanwhile, museum staff all across the United States are establishing labor unions to fight against the endemic precariousness they experience in the art world. This, in my view, is truly a new phase of Institutional Critique, only this time not taking the form of art works, installations or performances inside gallery spaces, but a systemic cultural challenge fomented right inside the very architecture of the art establishment itself. If I may, let me refer to my own troubled museum experience here as a way of further illuminating these criticisms. This historic rupture released the image from its signified, but also allowed it to become infinitely reproducible. Benjamin saw this as “the most significant achievement of the latest school of photography.” But this shift also allowed images to become “fungible” on a certain level, thus shareable with others. This potentially radical interchangeability is also what digital technology once held-out as its fundamental gift. And once social networks were truly established in the 1990s, digitalization offered anyone an inexpensive means of gifting or bartering work to others including such things as electronically encoded imagery, music, texts, data and so forth. Notably, these shareables include things that someone has produced themselves, but also things that they have appropriated from the ever-expanding archive of cyberspace.

For a short time in the late 1990s, I served as the New Museum’s Curator of Education. I organized three exhibitions, one of which was quite well received in the press [<https://www.nytimes.com/1998/08/14/arts/art-in-re-view-urban-encounters.html>], and I also managed a half-dozen artists who were assigned as faculty in local High Schools, along with scheduling all the public talks and museum walk-throughs for the curatorial staff, and on and on. It was, to be sure, an under-funded, overworked job, and do doubt exactly like 99.9% of other museum-related jobs around the world. But, one thing I did learn is that many of the mid-level staff, and even some senior staff such as myself, were themselves artists, or at least people who had studied art at the undergraduate, or graduate level, regardless if they were still producing work (and many were). Given that by now, most museum employees who studied art or art history have also learned the lessons of Institutional Critique

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in school, then we could say that the practice is now coming home to roost and being enacted by those who keep the museum operating, always invisible in plain sight, including the installers who physically hang canvases and construct exhibition walls, curatorial assistants who write press releases, the wait staff who serve lattes and biscotti in museum cafés, the janitors cleaning bathroom stalls, mopping floors, and the security guards who watch over multi-million-dollar objects adorning the white cube citadels of the fine art world.

This revelation was significant for me, and directly informed my dark matter thesis (thank you New Museum), including acknowledging the many individuals who share limited visibility as “artists,” and yet whose invisible work constitutes the essential shadow labor force that maintains and reproduces the art world as a far larger system. It is this internal engine that truly allows high cultural discourse, scholarship, journals, academies, publicity and personalities as well as of course its global marketplace, to converge in the form of a symbolic totality that we so often and so casually refer to as “the art world.” Nevertheless, as this asymmetrical structure is exposed – and I believe the art world has never been so visibly naked in this regard– it becomes impossible to avoid its many glaring contradictions and inequalities without a willful, eyes wide-shut act of enforced incomprehension. This is why, with apologies to Giorgio Agamben, I label the current state of the high cultural sphere our “bare art world.” So, what function does the museum have in this unconcealed context?

Do you recall that disquieting scene in *Children of Men*, director Alfonso Cuarón’s 2006, post-pandemic film in which a spreading wave of incurable infertility has ended humanity’s ability to sexually reproduce itself? At about the middle of the movie, after a lot of harrowing

scenes showing vast social breakdown and military occupations, we watch protagonist Clive Owen's character arrive at the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall. Once inside, he discovers that the enormous gallery is now the private bunker of an old friend and a government minister who has been keeping himself busy salvaging great art works from the surrounding chaos. The minister has proudly rescued Michelangelo's David; he failed to save the Pietà, but he has recovered Picasso's monumental canvas Guernica, which now hangs behind the family's dining room table. With the electro-melancholic music of early King Crimson playing in the background, Owen's character skeptically asks his host about the art collection, pointing out that "a hundred years from now, there won't be one sad fuck to look at any of this," and then adding, "what keeps you going?" The minister's terse reply is "I just don't think about it."

Not thinking about "it," is precisely what most museum programs already do today, thus serving to automatically sustain institutional logic, as opposed to critique, for its own sake, as if there was no fundamental social crisis present, no historical and ideological drift to contend with, no bare art world. Instead, it's business as usual. After all, we know that once upon a time the museum was a central doctrinal vehicle for the imaginary of the 19th century nation state, before it morphed into a spectacular, corporate-dominated machine in the 20th, but what we have today, in our bare art world, is institutional desperation dominated by programmatic distractions, as opposed to serious introspection, especially if we consider that our current reality is one of failing democracies and rising oligarchs, increasingly unstable environmental conditions, mass migrations and colonial legacies. Instead of inventing a new role for art world institutions, we find delirious bursts and bubbles involving NFTs, art-flipped paintings, monolithic museum buildings constructed in countries with gruesome human rights records, and Duty-Free warehouses stuffed with cultural loot that Hito Steyer has perceptibly described as the latest iteration of the white cube gallery on steroids.

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There are exceptions of course, the Van Abbemuseum in the Netherlands, Queens Museum in New York, and until recently, the Moderna Galerija in Ljubljana.

Therefore, when you ask Florent, under such circumstances, just what role should museums and similar cultural institutions play today, I suggest that we collectively agree to seek an end to this scandal, and recognized that there is no going back, no return to the “bad old days,” as Bertolt Brecht would contend, when museums and art claimed to be a beacon of enlightenment. Instead, we must concede that this bare art world, which is riddled with contradictions and paradoxe, is indeed our progeny, our responsibility, and our inheritance, however alarming that may be. Through both negation and imaginative construction, museums should be able to teach us that the past, as much as the future, holds out a thin hope for a radically different future, one that is fundamentally at odds with what we think we know: that yesterday and tomorrow will be exactly the same as the present: a habitual and repetitive aesthetic of unfreedom.

**Lately, I noticed a trend of artists working in connection with a context, a specific field, trying to address concrete and urgent problems. If you look at the Arte Util platform, you'll have an idea of what I am trying to describe. Have you noticed such a trend? Do you think it's a reaction to the institutional situation you've described?**

Hmmm...its curious that you observe this as a recent phenomenon Florent, because projects such as Tania Bruguera's Arte Util really are just the most recent iteration of a several decades-old trend, one that goes back at least to the mid 1960s. But I think I understand your point, so let me paint a picture in two scenes:

**First, we see the artist enter their studio and confront a blank canvas or chunk of uncut marble and then just wait for inspiration to take hold. It's classical art class 101, and more or less what I was taught at one point or another by certain artists in the academy (though not all).**

**Second, contrarily, we see the socially engaged artist who has embedded themselves with a specific community, or who has focused on a particular social cause, in which they work directly with non-art populations and activists in order to make work that addresses issues of community concern.**

This latter approach is traceable all the way back to the community arts movement in the UK, an Arts Council funded program under the relatively progressive Labour Government starting in 1964, and it was mirrored in the US with a similar cultural policy approach by the National Endowment for the Arts more or less at the same time. Already by the 1970s related national associations were forming such as NAPNOC (Neighborhood Arts Programs National Organizing Committee) and N.A.P. (Neighborhood Arts Program) in San Francisco, and in the UK the London Arts Council was very active supporting community arts up until the Tory's took over the government in 1979.

[NAPNOC Co-Founder Arlene Goldberg speaking about the organization](#)

[NAP San Francisco](#)

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By the 1980s these community art projects had expanded a great deal in scope, even as Margarete Thatcher and Ronald Reagan are already drastically cutting-back state funding for health care, social services, unions and the arts (as well as trying to privatize the cultural sector). In response you find community embedded projects pushing back on these cuts, for example in 1978 collaborative artists Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn work directly with London based trades councils and health care unions in to create a series of photomontage works analyzing and explaining Thatcher's anti-union policies, and then in 1981 they produce the project "The Changing Picture of Docklands," a large-scale public poster campaign focused on a working class neighborhood in London that was undergoing rapid redevelopment, what we would call today gentrification. Their billboard-sized photomontage works had titles like "What's Going on Behind our Backs?" and "Shattering the Developers' Illusions..." and the entire project was in collaboration with the local community, trade unions and other populations who were in danger of displacement.

Docklands Project short movie doc:

<https://incertainplaces.org/project/place-beyond-place-symposium/loraine-leeson-from-the-docklands/>

Of course, sadly, the Docklands is now fully gentrified, which raises the difficult question: just how effective is art as a political or social utility, a conversation that I have had with Tania on more than one occasion. [ <http://vols.worldrecordsjournal.org/04/08> ] Nonetheless, we can see in recent years, an entire alternate genealogy of contemporary art emerging from this dark matter multiverse into light as group and solo exhibitions highlight the work of these community artists including Mierle Laderman Ukeles who became the first "artist in residence" for the NYC Sanitation Dept in the 1980s,

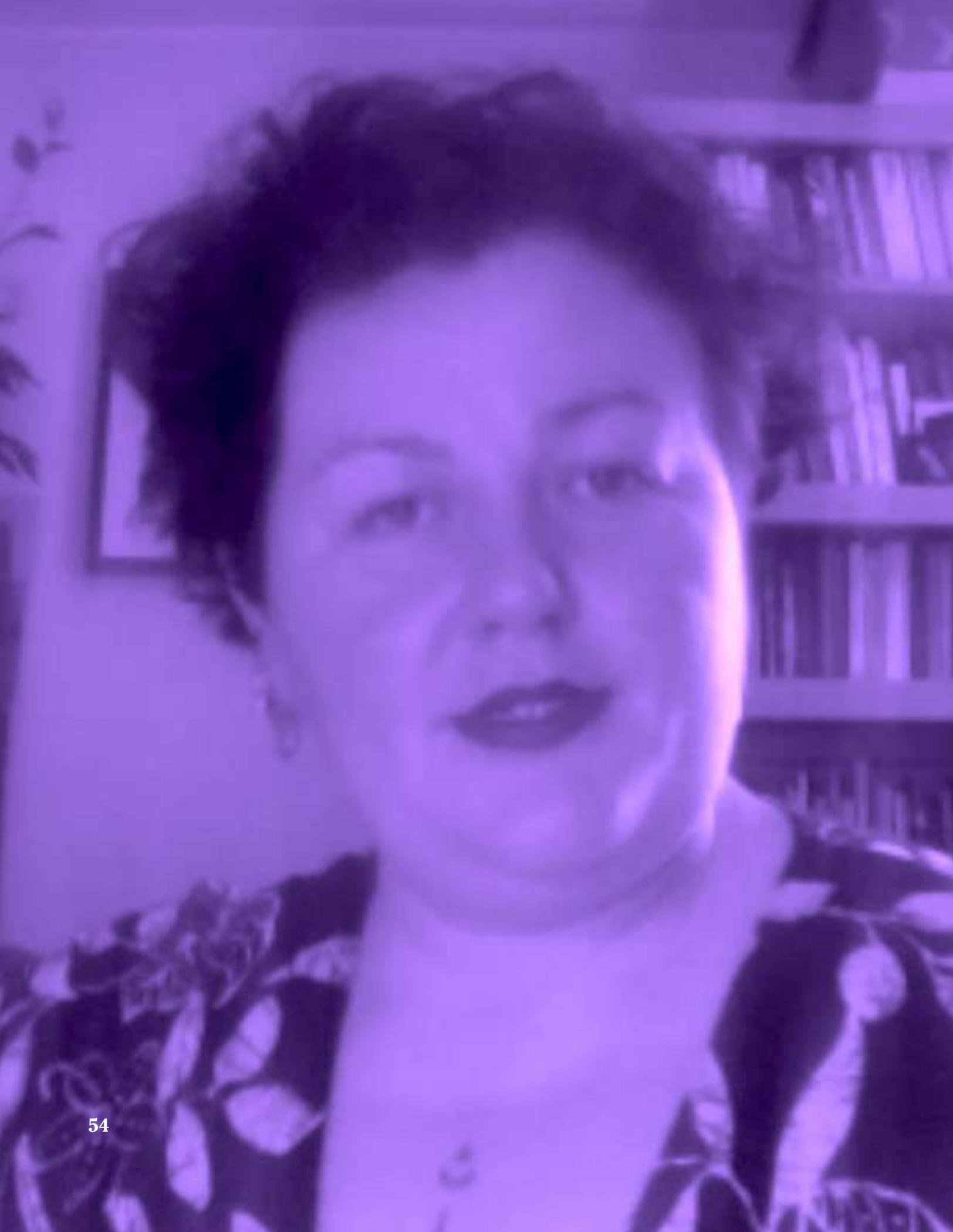
Rick Lowe and his Project Row Houses in a struggling Black community of Houston Texas from the early 1990s, as well as Suzanne Lacey and her work with young people and the police in Los Angeles also in the early 1990s. Add to this the street banner projects of Conrad Atkinson made working with unions in the UK, or the photomontage pieces by Carole Conde and Karl Beveridge working with unions in Canada, and we could also cite here the collective art activism of the Guerrilla Girls and their critique of sexism and racism in the art industry, or Gran Fury's with its 1980s AIDS awareness posters, and it goes on and on Florent, which may be why as these artists gradually become better known it appears such work is a recent phenomenon.

And perhaps this brings us back to your last question: what can we expect of museums going forwards? Acknowledging a certain artistic dark matter genealogy would certainly be one significant step that art institutions might take towards reimagining their relevance today.<sup>2</sup>

**GREGORY SHOLETTE** is a New York City based activist artist, writer and Professor of studio art at Queens College, CUNY. He has participated in, documented and written about activist art for over forty years. He is the author of *Delirium and Resistance* (Pluto, 2017), *Dark Matter* (Pluto, 2010) and co-author of *It's The Political Economy, Stupid* (Pluto, 2013).

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<sup>2</sup> - The Queens Museum exhibited Ukeles solo exhibition in 2016 and is now preparing a similar overview of Lacey's work for later this year, 2021, and both the Queens Museum and the Van Abbe presented Bruguera's Art Util project.



**VOICE OVER**

# ***EWA MAJEWSKA***

Feminist philosopher, political activist and an author

A zoom conversation with David Liver

***ON THE INSTITUTIONAL PARADOX,  
THE WEAKNESS OF INSTITUTIONS AND  
INSTITUTIONS AS A TOKEN OF EQUALITY***

**<https://vimeo.com/635201069>**

**VOICE OVER**

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Soy lugar común  
como el eco de las voces  
el rostro de la luna.

Tengo dos tetas  
-diminutas-  
la nariz oblonga  
la estatura del pueblo.

Miope  
de lengua vulgar  
nalgas caídas  
piel de naranja.

Me sitúo frente al espejo  
y me masturbo.

Soy mujer  
la más común  
entre las comunes.

Regina José Galindo

A los viajes al inframundo  
hay que ir solos  
con zapatos cómodos  
un calzón extra por aquello de las  
emergencias  
y ninguna maleta.

OCT. 2021

Asegúrate antes de tener tus papeles  
en orden  
para poder irte de allí cuando quieras  
sin que tus demonios te lo impidan.

Regina José Galindo



*VOICE OVER*

# **VICENTE TODOLÌ**

Contemporary art curator who has worked as director of several museums and art centres internationally, including the Tate Modern in London, currently Director of Hangar Bicocca in Milan

A zoom conversation with Matteo Binci

***A LESSON IN AUTONOMY FROM A CITRUS FRUIT OR  
THE MUSEUM AS AN ORANGE***

<https://vimeo.com/633800369>

# **LUIS CAMILLO OSORIO**

Contemporary art critic and Director of the Philosophy Department at PUC-Rio

A zoom conversation with Paolo Martore

***ON THE NEED OF INCLUSIVITY FOR MUSEUMS  
TO NEGOTIATE WITH SOCIETY, POLITICS AND CAPITALISM***

**<https://vimeo.com/636206354>**

*VOICE OVER*



**VOICE OVER**

OCT. 2021



# ***IN ADVANCE OF A BROKEN ARM: EN ATTENDANT LES PREMIÈRES NEIGES DE L'HIVER***

The following interview was conducted through email exchange by David Tomas, Editor of [PDF](#), an electronic storage and distribution platform, with Montréal-based artist [Guillaume Clermont](#).

The main topic of the interview was New Eldorado, a temporary off-space located in a backstreet of Hochelaga-Maisonneuve — one of Montréal's poorest neighbourhoods. The questions were asked in English and answered in French.

**PDF:** You were a member of a collective with Alexandre Jimenez, Marilou Crispin and Audrey J. that founded the six month exhibition platform New Eldorado in Montréal in 2015. Can you describe the project from your point of view, its character and objectives?

**Guillaume Clermont:** Pour cerner New Eldorado, du moins, pour en comprendre les motivations, il me semble important de rappeler le contexte dans lequel cette initiative a émergé. Ce contexte, qui n'a certes rien d'extraordinaire, est tout de même singulier, sinon spécifique.

Nous sommes en mai 2015. Depuis peu, après une absence prolongée, je suis de retour à Montréal. Je reviens d'un séjour à Bruxelles — pendant lequel j'ai passé

du temps aux Pays-Bas, en France et en Corée du Sud. En galère, sans travail et sans logement, Alex m'invite à venir habiter quelques temps chez lui. Il habite alors avec Marilou, rue Préfontaine, dans le quartier Hochelaga-Maisonneuve. Nous sommes rejoints par Audrey, une Belge de passage à Montréal qui compte traverser le Canada en voiture pendant l'été pour ainsi tenter de rejoindre le cercle polaire arctique. Par amis interposés, il était prévu de longue date qu'elle vienne habiter chez Alex et Marilou.

Nous voilà donc quatre à partager un même espace de vie, un quotidien. Ce quotidien, fait de tout et de rien (petits boulots, pâtes au pesto, soirées sans fin et autres cafetières matinales), est pour

ainsi dire indissociable de New Eldorado, comme souvent le contexte d'une pratique artistique est indissociable de celle-ci.

Un appartement, quatre amis, un peu de galère et quoi d'autre?

Un ras-le-bol. De la déception aussi. Un peu de cynisme peut-être. Mais, surtout, un besoin, une urgence: ne pas en rester là, passer à l'action, se mettre à l'œuvre, œuvrer. Alex et moi nous étions rencontrés lors de nos études à l'UQÀM. Nous avons également collaboré ensemble sur quelques projets. En partageant notre quotidien, nous avons beaucoup échangé au sujet de notre rapport au monde de l'art et plus particulièrement à la scène montréalaise. Nos points de vue respectifs sont autant divergents que complémentaires mais, surtout, critiques. À plusieurs niveaux, nous en avons marre, un ras-le-bol généralisé. Tout particulièrement en regard de l'institution artistique et de ses mécanismes de légitimation. Si je me rappelle bien, le constat est le suivant: ni pour ni contre l'institution, pourquoi ne pas faire sans celle-ci?

Un soir, après l'une de ses interminables discussions sur le balcon arrière de l'appartement, une décision est prise. Assez parlé, nous devons passer à l'action et agir. Il semble inutile de poursuivre toute critique ou joute verbale sans l'inévitable risque de tout passage à l'acte. Qu'elle soit

imparfaite, inutile, voire invisible, *une action vaut mieux que deux tu l'auras.*

Notre première idée est relativement simple: mettre en place un *dead drop*<sup>1</sup> dans la ruelle derrière le logement. Cette ruelle, adossée au mur couvert de graffitis d'une usine désaffectée, est en quelque sorte l'horizon bricolé de ce quotidien partagé. Une fresque, aussi maladroite que gigantesque, dépeint un hallucinant paysage aux accents faussement mexicains, parcouru par la bonne humeur et les clichés bon enfant. Une ruelle aux effluves de levures chimiques et de pisse, voilà le lieu de notre action.

Du balcon, nous ciblons la représentation de ce qui semble être une icône païenne. Cette dernière se trouve près d'une issue de secours, laquelle s'enfonce dans le mur du bâtiment et forme une sorte de vestibule, de cagibi ou d'alcôve. Ce détail architectural nous laisse croire que le *dead drop* sera quelque peu protégé des intempéries. Au moment de poser le dispositif, un autre détail attire notre attention: au plafond de ce cagibi, il y a une douille électrique. Intrigués, nous nous demandons si celle-ci est fonctionnelle. Rapide aller-retour à l'appartement, munis d'un escabeau et d'une ampoule, nous testons notre hypothèse. Comme dirait l'autre, et la *lumière fut...*

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<sup>1</sup> Voir le projet [Dead Drops](#) de l'artiste Aram Bartholl.



À partir de ce moment, nous entrons dans une phase de délire. Enfin, presque. Il est difficile de décrire le ravissement et l'enchantement que peuvent provoquer parfois des choses somme toute assez banales. N'empêche, cet éclat de lumière a l'effet d'une déflagration dans nos esprits: tout devient dès lors possible. Et si ce cagibi, qui fait à peine un mètre carré, devenait un lieu d'art à part entière, autonome?

Notre délire et nos rêveries se poursuivent quelques jours. Puis, nous nous laissons prendre au jeu. Après tout, au départ, New Eldorado prend la forme d'une boutade, d'un plan à la con. Nous décidons simplement de prendre au sérieux — très au sérieux même — cette mauvaise blague. New Eldorado a commencé en quelque sorte sur un coup de tête. Et si on le faisait?

Ensuite, tout se passe assez vite. De deux, nous passons à quatre, chacun des membres de l'appartement (et bien souvent les amis de l'un et de l'autre) participent au projet. Nous définissons alors un champ d'action, une marche à suivre, plus ou moins flexible, à partir des doléances et des critiques que nous avons à formuler envers le monde de l'art. Nous avons une seule certitude, *New Eldorado n'a pas peur de la mort et ne survivra pas aux premières neiges de l'hiver.*

Moins d'une dizaine de jours après la découverte de la douille électrique, New Eldorado est fonctionnel (identité visuelle, site internet, page Facebook, programmation artistique, etc.) et présente sa première exposition.<sup>2</sup> Le premier vernissage a lieu le 3 juin 2015.

Quels étaient les objectifs de New Eldorado? Nombreux, je les résumerais ainsi: passer à l'action. Ou, comme nous l'avions écrit sur le site de [New Eldorado](#), faire tranquillement de l'art à l'ombre de l'art, ici et maintenant, avec ce qu'on a.

\*\*\*

Following Guillaume's first answer, David replied:

"I read your answer. It sets everything out clearly. I'll think about what you say and send you another question soon..."

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<sup>2</sup> Roja, une proposition d'Alexandre Jimenez.

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Unfortunately, there has never been a second question. A few weeks later, David developed terminal cancer and died on April 3, 2019. The interview remained unfinished — and was never published.

It is published here for the very first time by the initiators of New Eldorado as a response to Voice Over invitation to write a text about what was a unexpected collective project driven by friendship<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> To learn more about New Eldorado, we invite you to read the Tim Dallett's interview about his project *Cabine téléphonique / Telephone Booth* in PDF#2 [[http://pub-doc-file.org/PDF\\_no2\\_2015.pdf](http://pub-doc-file.org/PDF_no2_2015.pdf)] (pp.189-209) or to visit [www.new-eldorado.info](http://www.new-eldorado.info).

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Formerly a non-visual artist, **Alexandre Jimenez** - [[www.enduitde-co.com](http://www.enduitde-co.com)] is now a professional artisan in Québec specialized in the application of decorative waxed concrete. However, out of the corner of his eye, he still revels in the superstition of institutional art spaces.

**Audrey J.** is working in a bookshop in Charleroi, Belgium. As with many things in her life, she took part in New Eldorado somehow by accident.

**David Tomas** (1950-2019) [[www.davidtomas.ca](http://www.davidtomas.ca)] was an artist, anthropologist and writer. His production in the visual arts has its roots in a post 1970s critique of conceptual art's disciplinary infrastructure.

**Guillaume Clermont** - [[www.guillaumeclermont.org](http://www.guillaumeclermont.org)] is interested in notions such as repetition, abandonment, self sabotage and the improbable. He is a member of la Guilde des artistes.

Born in Longueuil, Québec, **Marilou Crispin** is specialized in several fields, but wisely refrains from appropriating even one of them, just as she prefers dirt to cleanliness.



## **VOICE OVER**

Me niego a pensar que éste sea un país para hombres  
parí a una hija, hembra, y a ella no le negaré su derecho de piso  
mi abuela se lo ganó a punta de trabajos  
mi madre a punta de putazos

yo mi sitio me lo sigo ganando a diario  
yo soy yo pienso yo decido yo hago yo gano yo reacciono yo acciono

no saldré a la calle vestida de hombre para sortear el peligro  
y no dejaré de salir

no andaré siempre acompañada para evitar que me asalten  
y no dejaré de andar

no tomaré horchata en las fiestas para no merecer que me violen  
y no dejaré de tomar

Yo parí a mi hija en un país hecho para ella  
y aquí quiero que crezca  
con los ojos abiertos  
la consciencia abierta  
en pleno derecho de su libertad.

Regina José Galindo





**VOICE OVER**

# **GIORGIO DE FINIS**

Artist, filmmaker, anthropologist and Director of the Museo delle Periferie in Rome

A zoom conversation with Massimo Mazzone

**ON INHABITATE MUSEUMS,  
THE RIGHT TO RESIDE AND  
SELF-ORGANIZATION**

**<https://vimeo.com/636499016>**

'Il faut que les architectes admettent, et la population aussi, qu'un bâtiment puisse changer d'usage selon le développement de la société. On est loin de la fameuse théorie «la fonction crée l'organe». Un bâtiment repéré comme ayant une fonction digne se trouvera une nouvelle fonction digne.'

«Architects, along with the general population, need to accept that the way a building is used changes in line with societal development. We are very far from the famous theory of 'Function creates the organ'. A building that is identified as already having a worthy function will find a renewed worthy function.»

**CLAUDE PARENT**

from *Architectones*, by Francois Combin

**VOICE OVER**



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