

Back and Forth, Brazil | Canada

Exhibition

Making the impossible: contemporary art practices and networking

1.

I am fond of asking simple questions since unpretentiousness constitutes a method for the interrogation of reality. I also believe that the attempt to apprehend the world through discourse requires acknowledging the fact that when drafting queries, we are—in a very uncanny way—forcing reality to be as we want, desire or need it to be.

For a long time now, we came to learn that language shapes realness. And if we agree on that, we can agree that we have the ability to create it by following, among other things, our own interests. If we seek to understand a phenomenon as closer to its covert attributes and far from our own particular concerns and preconceptions we will, however, be forced to rethink our strategies.

Therefore, simplicity is for me the most effective tactic to embrace the unexpected, to clinch that portion, that gradient of life that runs away from our understanding. Not being able to grasp it at first hand, we are compelled to recognize the fact that on weaving tiny veins of apparently innocent questions, we will be closer to satisfying our curiosity and – most importantly—we might be lucky enough to obtain a serendipitous outcome.

2.

This brief introduction is just to say that when learning and debating about art, we are used to, or trained to, focus on the examination of the work of art, the aesthetic object. We tend to consider the formalist aspects, the visual elements (such as shape, composition, colours, structure, etc.) that are employed to configure it.

That is no accident. If we were educated to concentrate on the object, it is simply for the reason that the artistic educational institution (in any form and level) emphasizes the prevalence of the aesthetic result in order to conceal the modes of (re)production of the art field: the intricate threads of power interactions in which political, economic and ideological interests are at stake.

Thus, we are taught, by action or omission, to ask a certain range of questions when dealing with the complexity of art. And if these are usually driven towards the object, it is in order to disguise the system of disputes and negotiations that are far from the ideal of disinterestedness and *l'art pour l'art*.

I am not saying that art pieces are not important. I am saying that these objects are not the *only* important issue, the *single* entity that deserves our attention. It is crucial to broaden our perspective in order to reveal, through enquiry, how (contemporary) art practices might be about making possible the impossible.

3.

This is the reason why simple questions in and about

contemporary art have a great advantage. They dismantle the well-kept fiction of its “hermeticism”: a fabrication that states that in order to engage with its practices, a great deal of intellectual skills and erudition are needed. Notice the amount of dense texts and theories plotted at museums or on art halls’ walls trying to explain what contemporary art is. In most cases these are labyrinths of words that get us lost, extending the division between specialized and non-specialized audiences. Of course, like any field of knowledge, there are professionals involved who have their own particular theoretical frameworks. But it is less probable that, in our lives, we would visit, just out of curiosity, geneticists’, mathematicians’ or surgeons’ conventions, than an art show. So I wonder why many art agents still highly praise the subordinating and vertical knowledge division that intimidate and keep us far away from the reflections (sometimes hilarious, sometimes serious) that contemporary artists entice us to consider.

4.

Back to the main idea to move forth: simplicity.

When Duncan MacDonald (St. Catharines, Canada) and Nadja De Carvalho Lamas (Joinville, Brazil) invited me to participate as a writer for this exhibition, the first thing I thought, while sitting in front of my computer in Córdoba (Argentina) was that this was a good opportunity to raise a modest question regarding how it would be possible for a more friendly approach to contemporary art practices. Hence, I thought of the most epidermal interrogation, something that has always startled me: how does a contemporary art exhibition come together?

Here is the trick: simple questions in contemporary art (as in life) do not usually have simple answers, even though they frequently do tend to shake the structure of conventional knowledge.

Not simple, for there are too many different angles and perspectives to address the subject. Luckily for us workers of art, however, there are not so many formulas or prescriptions when dealing with the conception of contemporary art shows. Of course, there are typologies of exhibitions and some recipes for materializing and mounting them, but this is of no concern for the purpose of this text.¹

Besides, I intend to put into words some issues of the fascinating process for the realization of **Back and Forth**, but most outstandingly the necessary unconsciousness to achieve it by not following a well-known chore. This was the challenge that Duncan and Nadja were willing to face.

5.

Art exhibits are the most extended fashion for diffusing the work of artists. Thus, they could be understood as communicational devices that are conceived and built in order to expand the *visibilization* of contemporary art practices, along with the possibility of enabling the interaction between them and the public.

So, what Duncan and Nadja had in mind was something *simple*, something that has been infinitely and repetitively done across the globe. Yet, this would be an understatement – a very unjust underestimation – as they were well aware that the idea of an art show was just the beginning. They

understood, moreover, that neither the *form* nor the *outcome* constitutes the novelty.

Novelty, in times of sameness, in a world ruled by undermining obsolescence and –not paradoxically–governed by efficiency as a fundamental precondition for acting, has to do with subverting this order. It has to do with willingly abandoning the comfort zone to carry out a project based on not (aprioristically) knowing its result.

Back and Forth has to do with this. It has to do with accepting an enterprise that forced each of its members to navigate between the edges of uncertainty.

This was the invitation that artists Ehryn Torrell (Canada / England), Jefferson Kielwagen (Brazil / USA) and TiroTTi (Brazil) received and accepted with a great deal of audacity. They were invited to play a game based on the principle of contingency, in the sense of participating in an initiative that might have or might have not been and if being, it would have been in inconceivable, unthinkable ways. They embraced the game of chaos as they relinquished the sense of control in order to walk down a path of turmoil.

Nonetheless, the venture could only have been accomplished due to the devious linkage of individual abilities and the coordination of diverse approaches and styles of creating and producing contemporary art. In other words: they structured a unique way of networking since hierarchies were suspended and a mutual trust foundation was built due to the tacit recognition of the skills of these peers.

Back and Forth is an exhibition with exceptional characteristics. It is an adventure worth attending, as it encourages us to reaffirm trust and engagement far beyond contemporary art. It is a vibrant example to affirm that not a single thing is impossible when working together.

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¹ As for types of exhibits, the basic distinction is related to their (i) *form*, (ii) *content* and (iii) *nature of the relationship established with the public*. The web-site of ICOM – International Council of Museums has many open-access resources associated to this subject (<http://icom.museum/>). Furthermore, there is a large printed bibliography that can be consulted, which is focused on conceptual views of art institutions (mainly museums), as well as technical and procedural approaches to key aspects of their operations.



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