

Far From Local: policy and practice
(of art and culture) around the globe



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Letter from the Editors

When our shaky, if giddily profitable, financial infrastructure shattered around us in 2007, the art world (like any other sector) soberly realized that business as usual was no longer possible. Non-profits closed their doors within months, museums began hysterically deaccessioning collections, capital campaigns floundered mid-stream and certain art fairs began to teeter on the brink of disappearance. In our first issue of *e-merge*, we interviewed the key players of Art Chicago in the midst of this economic turmoil, keenly aware that the definition of that nebulous job title “arts administrator” would only grow increasingly uncertain as the art world continued to shift and adapt to these new economic realities.

While several interviews in our first issue frankly discussed the impact of the economy on Art Chicago and the institution of the “art fair” itself, the *e-merge* editorial team decided that an entire issue should be devoted to the consequences of the global financial crisis. What resulted from our call for papers, however, was a much farther-reaching, panoramic view of the intricate and deeply imbricated relationship between cultural policy, politics, economics, arts administration and institutional development than we had envisioned. While the course of events that was set in motion in 2007 seemed to herald a dramatic change in course, the papers we received reminded us that this is just another knot in a fascinatingly tangled narrative.

In this issue of *e-merge*, our contributors (all of whom are current MAAAP students or recent alums) take us across the globe, exploring cultural policy and institutional issues as they relate to the rapidly shifting political realities of the past 20 years. Hantao Shi presents a thoughtful and richly detailed portrait of the generation of '85 in communist China, a group of artists practicing an experimental art while carefully preserving their position within the state arts apparatus, while Katrina Enros tackles the contentious topic of censorship in the context of Canadian cultural policy, reminding us of the need for clearly defined censorship practices, particularly in the often hot-headed times of financial turmoil. Next, Paige Johnston critically questions the development of a unique model for a contemporary art museum in the aftermath of the Bosnian war, and Allison White delves into the hotly contested cultural developments in the United Arab Emirates, with a particular focus on East-West tensions and political bias that become manifest in the literature surrounding this topic. Finally, Grace Murray explores the building of two new contemporary art museums in India, which strive to reproduce well-known museological models while negotiating heightened visibility for a hitherto institutionally neglected facet of Indian cultural production.

While these papers touch on wildly diverse geographical locations and socio-political contexts, taken as a group they reveal subtle and surprising connections and commonalities, weaving together to create a loose and knotty image of a global art world. If we are truly heading into a brave new world of arts administration in the aftermath of the financial crash, what can we learn from these disparate case studies? What institutional models are reproducible, and which should be avoided? How can we encourage bottom-up, site-specific sustainability while playing by governmental rules, and the laws of the market?

--Rebecca Hernandez and Ania Szremski, co-editors

85 New Wave:
An Experimental Art System in China

by Hantao Shi

How to Approach the Official Art Institution: an Introduction

The Chinese official art institution refers to the party and state oriented dynamics of the cultural policies that have been implemented in communist China. This institution monopolizes the majority of available resources and holds absolute leadership in every aspect of the arts, transplanting political ideals into the cultural field. Its policy system is a part of the propaganda mechanism of the Communist Party, and consists of the Party's conferences, political movements, and an enormous bureaucracy that is interpreting, conveying and implementing relevant policies.

This paper is an excerpt from the thesis "The Values and Policy System - An Investigation of the Chinese Official Art Institution", which explores the mechanics of this official institution in two parts. In the first part, I discussed the Talks at the Yan'an Forum of Literature and Art of 1942 and The First National Congress of Literature and Art Workers that took place in 1949 in Beijing. At the former, the party delineated its cultural values, declaring that "literature and art serve the masses of people," by which it legitimized the Party's leadership of art. The latter event marked the establishment of the Party's cultural policy system, by which it would maintain its leadership. The second part of the thesis focused on the period from 1979 to 1989, which has been called "the first reforming procedure in China during the last thirty years" by Zhu Xueqin¹. During this decade, the party changed its previous cultural values as expressed in the slogan: "literature and art serve modernization," which brought radical social change along with an upsurge in the study of western thought and culture. In the paper presented here, I discuss the dilemma of the official art institution, which has appeared since then, and also investigate the experimental art movement of that time known as 85 New Wave, looking mainly at its institutional significance.

Problems of Cultural Policy Studies in the Chinese Context

I consider the art institution as a major component of cultural policy, which is defined by Toby Miller as, "...the institutional supports that channel both aesthetic creativity and collective ways of life."² For Miller, "aesthetic creativity" and the "collective ways of life" constitute the twofold nature of the concept of culture. The cultural policy and the art institution referenced in this definition are not limited to specific projects, organizations, or governmental legislation and policies, but rather, in the context of Foucault's "governmentality"⁴ with its intense political signification, and also include the mechanisms of the government's self-legitimatization, used to maintain and justify its political power.

At present, most cases of cultural policy studies are based on the model of western democratic politics, which implies that, theoretically, cultural policies are the results of negotiations in specific communities. Miller emphasizes the "channeling" function of the cultural policy in his definition. I believe that the "creativity" and the "way of life" that are channeled also respectively refer to the ideal values of individuals and the social reality of the collective life; ultimately the cultural policy is the "channel," the way of negotiation, to solve the conflicts between these two factors. In this situation, the subjects of cultural policy studies are normally the nonconformities between the result of negotiations and democratic ideals, such as how to solve the problem of mainstream values oppressing the expression of minority groups. However, in the case of China's one party dictatorship, cultural policies are directly provided by the unchangeable authority, and oriented to its given values. The values are exclusive and protected by the cultural policies and the state apparatus, whose purposes are to assimilate or eliminate the values of nonconforming groups, big or small. Therefore, it is meaningless to adopt the idea of "solving the problem of mainstream values oppressing the expression of minority groups" when we investigate the Chinese cases. Assimilation and elimination are embedded in the very nature of the Chinese art institution, and addressing issues of oppression is contrary to the original motivation of Chinese policy.

¹ Zhu, Xueqing, *Opinions on the Thirty Years Reform: the Speech on Lingnan Great Forum*, Guangzhou, December 15th, 2007.

² , Toby, and George Yudice, *Cultural Policy*, London: SAGE Publication, 2002 1.

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The usual mode in cultural policy studies is “to compare the results of implementation to the original intentions” and to find the problem of the implementing mechanism, which connects the intention and the result. The premise of this idea is that the implementing mechanism is negotiable. But in contemporary Chinese regimes, both the intention and the implementing mechanism are established by the government, so there is little possibility for negotiation, discussion, or question. If we continue to focus on the implementing mechanism, we will easily get into debates over political ethics, and the real cultural complex beneath the given cultural institution will be neglected.

Therefore, in this study I have attempted to remain neutral and avoided categories such as good/bad or right/wrong to the Chinese government’s approach of instituting a monolithic ideology of art (in contrast to the western ideology of cultural diversity). Furthermore, in taking a neutral stance toward the centralized Chinese official art institution, I have looked for the values which orient it, and compared those to the values it espouses. I believe that the given values within the centralized institution do not always conform to the policy system. The case study of the 85 New Wave generation is particularly compelling for an exploration of these dynamics.

85 New Wave and Its Institutional Significance

In May 1985, the exhibition *Young Art of the Progressive China* opened at the National Museum of Fine Art. Despite being officially organized, it presented artworks in free and diversified styles. Following this exhibition, there was a boom in experimental art groups and events nationwide. As then editor of *Art* Gao Minglu noted, 87 art groups appeared from 1985 to 1987, and more than 2,250 artists attended 150 major art activities³, all of which culminated in the emergence of a new art movement after the post-Cultural Revolution period, known as the 85 New Wave.

The January 1986 issue of *Art Trends* published Gao’s famous critical article, “The End of an Epoch,” a Discussion of the Sixth National Art Exhibition,⁴ which expressed the art philosophy of the 85 New Wave and came to be known as its manifesto. The epoch Gao referred to was the time of “art reflecting the social life,” including the entire period before the mid-1980s. According to Gao, in the Sixth National Art Exhibition, “the reality that the painters deliberately built up, which seemingly was against the delusive reality in the art during the Cultural Revolution, has been another kind of ‘delusive reality;’” and he thought this was because the idea of “art reflecting the social life” and the doctrine of socialist realism were still influencing the creation of art. He furthered the discourse that, “previously the meaning of ‘life’ was limited to the peasants, workers, and soldiers, without artists and intellectuals; but at the very moment of today, a new class of intelligentsia has emerged, which has broken the limits of the peasants, workers, and soldiers.”⁵ He then introduced the ideas of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) expressed in *The Vocation of Man*, and suggested that the artists should take Fichte’s term “subjective consciousness” to resist the opinion of “art reflecting social life”, claiming that art should reflect “the spiritual world from artists’ subjective hyper-sensibility.” Finally, he concluded, “the art scenario in 1985 has manifested our decisive will and volition, a new concept of art has been on its way....”⁶

Gao explained the artistic need to break boundaries with his observation, “Proper limits have to be exceeded in order to right a wrong, or else the wrong cannot be righted. Today we must respect the individualized thinking, and enhance our subjective consciousness.”⁷ Gao’s discourse presented a very typical idea of art held by young artists at the time. If “post-Cultural Revolution art” was an opposition to the dogmatic interpretation of the Cultural Revolution and its represented political messages, then young artists in the mid-1980s were pushing this process to a much deeper level—they were opposing not only the Cultural Revolution, but also the art of the post-Cultural Revolution and the pre-Cultural Revolution periods. They purported to deny all preceding artistic movements that were based on the realistic idea. As Gao pointed at the beginning of the article, “There is a widely

³ Gao, Minglu. *The Wall: the History and the board of Chinese Contemporary Art*. Beijing: People’s University of China Press, 2006.

⁴ Gao, Minglu. “The End of a Epoch, a Discussion about the Sixth National Art Exhibition.” *Art Trends*, January 1986.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

existing 'reversal mind' within the painters that 'we will oppose anything embraced by the Sixth National Art Exhibition'...."⁸ (a retrospective of the post-Cultural Revolution period). They intended to bring about a new art revolution and create an "advanced" art.

The young artists of the "art revolution" studied and adopted western forms and styles dating from the modernist wave and beyond. Both Fei Dawei and Li Xianting coincidentally used the same term to describe the young artists' pursuit of western art; they said, "during the New Wave Movement, in only a couple years, Chinese artists practiced one hundred years of the history of their western precursors."⁹ For example, in the field of painting during the post-Cultural Revolution era, realism was still the dominating mode; although some artists started to practice Impressionism, hardly any art was produced in Expressionist, Cubist or abstract styles. But in the 85 New Wave, most of the young artists' work was abstract, Cubist or Expressionist, and some artists experimented with Pop Art in various media. More appealingly, many other artists began to work on Ready Made, Performance, Installation, and Image experiments. Like Xu Bing's installation *The Book from the Sky* (1987-1991); Wu Shanzhuan's installation *Red Humor* (1986); Huang Yongping's *Wet Method- "History of Chinese Painting" and "Concise History of Modern Painting" Washed for Two Minutes in a Washing Machine* (1987); these extraordinary works pushed the board of Chinese art to the most popular style in the international art field. Furthermore, some artists were also exploring deeper levels of communication between art and the audiences. They brought their works and activities to public spaces with events such as *Basking in the Sun* in Xuanwuhu Park in Nan Jing. The Shanghai M Group, for instance, implemented their performance directly on a busy street.

The Art Resources of the Movement

In the above paragraphs I introduced the New Wave artists' and critics' establishment of their alternative knowledge structure and independent art values, and also their Enlightenment intentions, which corresponded to the debates regarding the modernization and the New Enlightenment Movement at large. However, a nationwide experimental art wave would not have happened merely based on the intentions, knowledge, and values of artists and intellectuals. Another crucial factor in the scale of the New Wave was the support from exhibition spaces, media, and the other academic activities. Accompanying the New Wave artists' independence from mainstream art values, these support structures enabled their independence from institutional resources as well. It was a break from the official institution's monopoly that for thirty years forced artists to work and live within the institution, without any other option. Next, I will focus on these spaces and media supports in order to investigate the occupation of art resources by the New Wave artists.

Exhibition Spaces

The most influential exhibition space was the National Museum of Fine Art. Established in 1963, it belonged to the Cultural Ministry, and was administered by the Chinese Artists Association. Before 1978, the main content of its collections and exhibitions were revolutionary art and posters, traditional Chinese paintings, folk art, and modern Chinese picture books. Beginning with the "Exhibition of the Nineteenth Century French Rural Landscape Paintings" in March 1978, the represented genres became more diverse. Western modernist art and some non-official contemporary Chinese works were accepted. During the post-Cultural Revolution period, some important exhibitions were mounted including the "Second Exhibition of Star Group" (February 1980), the "Exhibition of the French Modern Painter Jean Helion" (October 1980), the "Exhibition of Oil Painting from Sichuan Academy of Fine Art" (January 1981), "Famous Works in the Last Five Hundred Years: Works from the Hammer Galleries from the United States" (March 1982), the "Exhibition of French Painter Pablo Picasso" (May 1983), and the "Exhibition of Norwegian Painter Edvard Munch" (October 1983) among others.

Following these exhibitions, the museum showed a more open stance toward the experimental art wave of the time. In May 1985, the museum opened "Young Art of Progressive China," the starting point of 85 New Wave. This exhibition publicly challenged the conservative stance of the official institution. In November of the same year, the museum held the "International Tour Exhibition of Robert Rauschenberg," the first American Pop Art show in China. As Li Xianting said, although the artists confused Pop with Dada at that time, the Rauschenberg exhibition did inspire artists to experiment much further, particularly on the adoption of art media while creating the

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Fei, Dawei. '85 *New Wave: The Birth of Chinese Contemporary Art*. Ullense Center for Contemporary Art & Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2007 12.

works.¹⁰ In October 1988, two solo installations opened at the same time at the museum: an exhibition of Xu Bing's prints: *The Book from the Sky*, and an exhibition of Lv Shengzhong's paper cut works; these were the first exhibitions of contemporary experimental artists to be shown in a national museum in China.

In December, the museum created a sensation when it opened an exhibition of nude oil paintings, the first ever in China. The works were in the style of pure aestheticism, and attracted more than two hundred thousand visitors to the exhibition over its twenty-day run. This trend did not stop until February 1989, with the "China Avant-Garde Exhibition" and its provocative black and white posters of the No-U Turn traffic symbol. This exhibition consisted of experimental paintings and installations created over the past years; this exhibition, with its provocative performance, which included a gun-shooting incident, marked the conclusion of the 85 New Wave.

Whatever its intentions in mounting these exhibitions, the National Museum of Fine Art had provided great support and encouragement to the New Wave Movement. The exceptional significance of this support obviously lay in the symbolic importance of the museum as the highest-level exhibition space of the official institution. Its program would certainly be seen as a reflection of the authority's attitude toward art experiments and the movement, which was crucial for artistic activities both inside and outside of the institution.

In addition to the National Museum of Fine Art, New Wave exhibitions and activities were also seen at other venues throughout the country. These can be categorized as the following types: firstly, exhibitions and activities held at provincial and municipal-level art museums such as the "Modern Art Exhibition of Xiamen Dada" at Fujian Art Museum (September 1986), the "First Shanghai Young Art Exhibition" at Shanghai Art Museum (April 1986), and the "Jiangsu Young Art Week—Modern Art Exhibition" at Jiangsu Art Museum (October 1986); secondly, those at galleries owned by local artists associations, such as the "Exhibition of Shengsheng Painting" at the gallery of the Xi'an Artists Association; thirdly, those at urban cultural spaces, such as libraries, workers' cultural palaces, and workers' clubs such as "Yunnan & Shanghai – Exhibition of the New Realistic Painting" at the Jingan District Workers' Cultural Palace (June 1985), the performance of M Art Group at the Hongkou District Workers' Cultural Palace (December 1986), and the "Third Exhibition of the New Realistic Painting" at Yunnan Provincial Library (October 1986); and fourthly, those at schools, such as the Central Academy of Fine Art, the China Academy of Fine Art, Beijing University, Fudan University, Zhongshan University, and Changchun Art School, such as "Modern Painting Exhibition of Six Artists" at the Student Club of Fudan University (March 1985) and the "Exhibition of Red70%, Black25%, White5%" at the China Academy of Fine Art (May 1986).

In addition to these "formal" exhibition spaces, experimental art also spread into the parks, streets, open air theaters, and other public spaces. Notable examples include the Pool Society's performance of *Environment Works No.1 – Series Yang Taiji* on the street (1986), and *Work No. 2 – Strollers in the Green Space in the Grove* (1986), Shanghai M Art Group's performance at Wusong Pier (1985), and the Nanjing artists' collective event, *Bringing to Light* at Xuanwuhu Park (1986).

These spaces where the New Wave artists presented their experimental work were an intrinsic component of the movement. Previously, I mentioned the extremely strict and complicated process of censorship artists were required to submit to for national art exhibitions in the 1970s. During that time, when the institution controlled all the spaces and organizations, the New Wave certainly could not have existed.

Art Publications

In addition to exhibition spaces, the New Wave was also supported and encouraged by the art media, of which *Art*, the only official publication of the Chinese Artists Association, was one of the most important at the time. The support of *Art* for new art activities and ideas began in the post-Cultural Revolution period, when the rehabilitated rightist He Rong was assigned as new chief editor in the late 1970s; and soon, Li Xianting filled the position of editor. Under the efforts of He and Li, the magazine published Wu Guanzhong's series of controversial articles questioning traditional revolutionary aesthetics, introduced the exhibitions of Star Art Group, and strongly advocated for the Native Soil Art and Scar Art styles. At the end of 1983, Li organized a special feature on contemporary abstract art, which led to his suspension during the campaign to Clean Up the Spiritual Pollution and consequently to his leaving the magazine. The new chief editor, Shao Dazhen, and editor Gao Minglu were open minded toward the new art phenomena, and it was not long before *Art* devoted itself to the art upheaval known as 85 New Wave. However, this support resulted in a different outcome.

Post-Cultural Revolution art was basically a reflection of the Party's political ideals at the time, but the New Wave Movement manifested the alternative ideas and independent attitudes of artists and critics. The art

¹⁰ Liu, Chun. "Retrospection of Chinese Avant-Garde Art: An Interview to Li Xianting." *Tianya* magazine, April 2000.

experiments were also much more radical than before. Secondly, the magazine engaged at a deeper level with New Wave art. From the special feature on the “Exhibition of Young Art of Progressive China” in 1985, to the report and discussion on the “China Avant-Garde Exhibition” in 1989—both articles consuming more than half the total content of the issues—*Art* gave proportionately more space to the work and criticism of New Wave art. Its authors included most of the key names in the movement, like Shu Qun, Wang Guangyi, Xu Bing, Gu Wenda, Lv Shengzhong, Huang Yongping, Yi Ying, Shui Tianzhong, Lang Shaojun, and others. The content consisted not only of the usual introduction of the art works, reports on important activities, and theoretical discussions, but also special features on a range of topics, such as contemporary painting, Chinese traditional painting, the relationship between art and philosophy, and Western modernism and post-modernism. Thirdly, *Art* had established an extensive cooperation with other art media and organizations like *Fine Arts in China*, *Art Trends*, *Painter*, and the Visual Art Research Institute of the Chinese Arts Research Academy. During the New Wave, it was common for editors from one magazine to write for others, and a stable group of writers was thus formed who could share each others’ platforms. Moreover editors from *Art*, like Gao Minglu, Tang Qingnian, and Yin Shuangxi, also frequently cooperated with other critics and artists to organize symposiums and exhibitions. Some of these joint ventures included the Zhuhai Symposium, the Huangshan Symposium, and the China Avant-Garde Exhibition. All these events played a critical role in furthering the New Wave Movement. So, based on the above discussion, we could even say that *Art* actually had become more than merely the official magazine of the institution; rather, I would like to say that it was an active force in the New Enlightenment as it affected the entire field of art and culture.

Beginning in late 1989, the institution organized activities intensely critical to the New Wave. Li Qi, the vice chairman of the Chinese Artists Association, once said, “...in the last few years, Marxism and Mao Zedong’s Thoughts [sic] were unfairly treated. In the art field, the articles that were written by Cai Ruohong, Gu Yuan, Liu Kaiqu, and the other prestigious vice chairmen of the association to review and study the Talks at the Yan’an Forum of Literature and Art, were surprisingly rejected by Art...”¹¹ Certainly, it was a reasonable request to ask the association’s official magazine to publish articles by the association’s leaders; Li Qi’s speech proved that the association was no longer able to control its own resources, and *Art* was much more aligned with the New Wave Movement. However, the New Wave artists could also justify their position as they, also, were “Chinese artists” too, and thus deserved significant representation in the Chinese Artists Association’s magazine.

Besides *Art*, the New Wave had other new media resources, as the period saw the emergence of many new art magazines and newspapers that strongly advocated for the new art movements. The most famous group of media was branded “Two Magazines and One Newspaper” and consisted of *Fine Arts in China*, a weekly newspaper founded by the Visual Arts Research Institute of the Chinese Arts Research Academy in July 1985 in Beijing; the *Jiangsu Pictorial*, founded by the Jiangsu Fine Art Press in January 1985 in Nanjing; and *Art Trends*, founded by Hubei Fine Art Press in January 1985 in Wuhan. These three publications became famous for their aggressive support of the movement. Some other important magazines included *Painter*, published by the Hunan Fine Art Press; *Fine Art Research*, published by the Central Academy of Fine Art; and the *Compilations of Translation in Art*, published by the China Academy of Fine Art. Although the latter two, particularly the *Compilations of Translation in Art*, didn’t have direct coverage of New Wave activities, they introduced many important western art theories and works throughout the 1980s, which were very influential for artists and critics; and their composed and independent attitude during the art upheaval even reminded some artists to reconsider the movement in time. Being out of the direct supervision of the association, these new media were much more free to decide their content. For instance, of *Fine Arts in China*, Li Xianting¹² recalled that “at the beginning it was tough, they required us ‘to suit both refined and popular tastes.’ When winter came, the other editors were busy in the other stuff, only I and another visual editor were on the positions; and then I completely changed style and content....”¹³

Following this change, Li and chief editor Liu Xiaochun led the newspaper to be totally on the side of the movement. Under their leadership, the magazine would become the most provocative art publication of the time, systematically introducing young artists one by one, devoting a full page to each. In 1987, it published an article

¹¹ Li, Qi. “We Should Be Practical and Realistic.” *Art*, February 1991 27.

¹² Li was assigned as the only full-time editor of the newspaper after almost two years suspension at the *Art* magazine. Most other editors were the researchers of the Visual Art Research Institute.

¹³ Anonymous author. “Li Xianting in ‘85 New Wave.” Online. http://85.ucca.org.cn/news/interview-artist/2007/10/07_10_24_JE7AG.shtml (October 2007).

titled “Rewarding or Redistribution?” as the headline on the cover page. Its question referred to the result of the First Urban Sculpture Competition, in which the best nine pieces of works were all by jury members, and certainly among the most established of artists and officials in the Chinese Artists Association. This case, which brought the newspaper into a lawsuit in 1988, showed that *Fine Arts in China* was not only sympathetic to the New Wave, but also willing to challenge the authority of the institution, and particularly the institution’s occupation of the art resources.

Symposiums

In addition to the occupation of spaces and media, the New Wave also developed art resources by way of other formats. For example, the symposium was adopted as a frequent vehicle for young artists and critics. Previous academic activities had typically been organized by institutional organizations, which were also dominated by prominent official artists and critics. In contrast, the symposiums of the New Wave were implemented by the younger generation. Through periodic meetings, as a way of integrating the various forces of the movement, they provided a forum for artists and critics to meet, discuss the latest works and trends, communicate information, and plan other activities. Some important symposiums included the “Oil Painting Art Symposium” at Jing County in April 1985, the “85 Young Art Thoughts Symposium and Slide Show” at Zhuhai in August 1986, and the “China Modern Art Creation Symposium” at Huangshan Mountain in November 1988. Furthermore, as part of the New Enlightenment Movement, the Art New Wave also received supports from other cultural fields. For instance, the organizers of the “China Avant-Garde Exhibition,” in addition to *Art magazine* and *Fine Arts in China*, included *Culture – China and the World*, one of the leading publishing studios of the Enlightenment; *Dushu* magazine; and *Free Talking of Literature* magazine. This kind of outside support not only provided academic support for the activities, but also brought the New Wave into a larger cultural context.

The Limitation of the New Wave

I have argued that 85 New Wave gained its independence from the institutional control and monopoly of art values and resources beginning in the mid-1980s. However, this independence did not mean that the New Wave became a new art institution in China, nor did it integrate with the official institution. The New Wave is only a name referring to the upheaval in art at the time; no formal organizations or policies were formed to consistently support the alternative ideas being expressed, to say nothing of the artists and critics involved.

The New Wave Movement represented an unprecedented break from the Party’s ideological control and monopoly of art resources. At the same time, this movement followed the premise of the Party’s “limited opening” process, which created a paradoxical situation for the New Wave. However, if the movement’s reliance on the institution’s “openness” was merely an objective reality or the tactic of the art “revolution,” paradoxically, during the movement, the artists’ and critics’ reliance on the institution was also a choice that they actively made. This “active reliance” displayed real limitation in the movement corresponding to the Party’s “limited openness,” and I would thus call the movement a “limited revolution.”

The limitation can first of all be seen in the identity of the New Wave artists and critics, as I have pointed out, most of whom were serving in official art organizations. They would not occupy or develop their own art resources outside the institution; and their experiments would not be realized without occupying a certain part of official resources. Admittedly in the 1980s, the institution still controlled most of the art organizations and other resources, but alternatives to the institution or ways of life for artists did begin emerging. In the mid-1980s the domestic art market was thriving. At the same time, a few artists had left their institutional jobs and begun to move into the “Yuanmingyuan Art Village” and support themselves through the sale of their works.¹⁴ However, for most of the New Wave artists, they had either neglected the possibilities of real independence that could be achieved by adopting these alternative means of livelihood, or held a hostile attitude toward the commercialization of art. The only path to “revolution” for the New Wave artists was in a contradictory relationship to the institution, with a dependence on it that conflicted with their ideological opposition to it.

Secondly, even as the “revolution” occurred from inside of the institution, it was also a struggle against a false target. Continuing to evaluate the institution by its values and policy system separately, I call the New Wave the “revolution from inside the institution.” The members of the movement were from the policy system in the official art institution; but in terms of values, they kept an independent stance and aggressively questioned the official ideologies. For the New Wave, this defined anti-institution. To understand the framework of the “inside

¹⁴ Wang, Jifang. *The Last Romance in Twenty Century: the Life of Independent Artists in Beijing*. Ha’erbing: Northern Literary and Art Press, 1999.

revolution,” we can borrow again from the ideas of Xu Jilin. “The only possibility for the intellectuals was to get around the sensitive topics of institutional reform, and to create a new thinking space through the cultural debates.”¹⁵ However, I have also suggested that the Party had already given up the debates on ideologies and values in the 1980s, retaining only the monopoly of art resources and the policy system. In these terms, the New Wave’s radical ideological appeals were also “gotten around” by the Party’s institutional reform. The New Wave Movement was targeting values that were ultimately no longer essential to the institution.

Thirdly, in spite of being deeply influenced by Western art theories and modern philosophies in the 1980s, the New Wave artists and critics still constituted a generation fed by Party education, as they came of age in the fifties, sixties and seventies. Their thinking was shaped by a mixture of long-held historical dreams of national modernization and revolutionary consciousness; the former was an unquestionable ideal and the responsibility of every Chinese person, while the latter was believed to be the sole and necessary way to realize that ideal. We could clearly see in their very fundamental level of thinking that the “westernized” artists and critics had deep roots in the Party’s ideologies. For instance, in the 1980s, it was popularly believed that the New Enlightenment was to accomplish the “unfinished process of cultural modernization started with the May Fourth Movement;” Gao Minglu moved this idea to the art fields, and took the New Wave as a part of the “new cultural transformation that emerged in China since the May Fourth Movement.”¹⁶ But interestingly, the May Fourth Movement was used by the Party to give cultural legitimacy to its ideology. Mao praised Lu Xun, saying “the road he took was the very road of China’s new national culture,”¹⁷ referring directly to the May Fourth spirit.

Taking the New Wave as an ideological revolution in the art fields, I am not questioning the completeness of the revolution; it is more important to note that the consciousness of “modernization” and “revolution,” rooted in young artists’ thinking had seemingly predetermined the “failure” of the movement.

In the art field, the problem of the official art institution was not whether it was correct or not in terms of the values of “literature and art serve masses of people” or “literature and art serve modernization,” but rather in the Party’s monopoly of the art resources and its strict control of the policy system, which forced artists to serve a single ideology, and oppressed those who didn’t. The political significance of the problem was that it denied the people’s rights to make decisions about their own aesthetics and culture, and ultimately about their lives. Whereas, in the New Wave Movement, the artists’ new “revolution” in values simply replaced the Party’s ideologies with their own alternatives, offering another new “advanced” culture or life. Again, in the “revolution,” the people—seen as the “herd”—were easily represented by the artists who called themselves the “supermen.” The social reality, the people’s lives, and their “retrogressive” aesthetics were neglected or even despised during the process of modernization. In fact, within the expression of New Wave artists and critics, we can hardly find any realistic thinking about the status quo of the society that had emerged in the post-Cultural Revolution period. Rather, we find only an idealized, abstract future and their own revolutionary fervor.

I would rather believe that no matter what the terms of the politics or ethics, that ideal that “literature and art serve masses of people” is much more reasonable than the New Wave elitist appeals of art. Accordingly, what could we expect of the New Wave Movement leading the art revolution? Zhu Xueqing once said, at the end of 1970s, that the Chinese revolution had moved from the square to the kitchen,¹⁰⁷ meaning that the Party and intellectuals had started to explore ways of optimizing reality through political changes, instead of being limited to ideological struggles. However, the New Wave artists seemingly brought the revolution back to the square from the kitchen. Of course, artists aren’t obligated to be politically-oriented, and I find little value in discussing “success” or “failure” in terms of an art movement. But, since the New Wave represents a moment were thinking of how to express and further national modernization, would the modernization that was constructed upon those personal inspirations really be the one for the Chinese people? When and how would the people’s lives be considered as essential to the art and culture of China? When and how would the masses of people start to determine their own aesthetics and cultural life, and finally dominate the ongoing transformation of today’s Chinese culture?

¹⁵ Xu, Jilin. “Introduction.” *Self-Disintegration of the Enlightenment: A Study on the Debates in the ideological and Cultural Circles in China since 1990*. Ed. Xu, Jilin, and Gang Luo. Changchun: Jilin Publication Group, 2007 1-71

¹⁶ Gao, Minglu. *Avant-Garde Art in China*. Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 1997 107.

¹⁷ Mao, Zedong. “On New Democracy.” *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967. Vol. II. 339-84.

Conclusion

I introduced the 85 New Wave as an unprecedented break from the Party's ideologies and policy system—a movement expected to further national modernization by appealing to alternative ideologies that could be easily suppressed when the pragmatic official institution thought necessary. At the same time, we could even see the limitation of the New Wave artists that was fundamentally rooted in the education they had received from the Party. The New Wave aggressively explored national modernization based on the revolutions of culture, within which, however, the essential meaning of the culture and the people's ordinary lives were substantially neglected. The movement saw the artists and intellectuals sharing art resources with the official institution, excluding any participation by the people.

From 1989 to 1993, Chinese people might have experienced the most paradoxical time in their history. On June 4, 1989, in the name of “anti-capitalist liberalism” and to avoid “running the risk of undermining our Party and our country,” the communist government overwhelmingly suppressed the student protests in Tiananmen Square, shooting students and others. But since the end of 1992, when Deng gave the Southern Tour Speech, the largest communist government in the world led China through a most radical capitalist transformation¹⁸; these conflicting approaches were both referred to as the ‘dream of modernization.’ This contradiction stripped all legitimacy from the ideologies, and brought the Chinese people back to the “kitchen” from the “square.” Since then, the question of how to realize “modernization” through an optimized policy system remained one of the most significant questions for this society. However, in the art field, neither metaphysical theories nor the improvement of the official institution was addressed further.

Suddenly, however, an international art mechanism consisting of the market and scholarship appeared, offering Chinese artists an unprecedented opportunity to develop new work. This soon became the new institution, through which contemporary artists are expected to approach their modernized life. It is hard to say whether it was fortunate or not to be provided with this institution. On one hand, the market created enormous art resources and opportunities for the artists in the form of funding, exhibitions, spaces and even social positions; it was, in effect, the first time Chinese artists had the means to survive outside the control of the official art institution. On the other hand, although the new art institution provided the means for making a living, the problems that had existed since the 1980s had actually never been solved. Moreover, the official institution began to merge increasingly indissolubly with the market, forming a new and much stronger art industry than had previously existed. Whether this was the authorization of the market or the commercialization of the official institution is not significant; what matters is that art had never been so far removed from the common Chinese people, and so close to the money. A new elite, consisting of artists, critics, curators, dealers, gallery owners, museum professionals, as well as officials, now dominated this new combined institution, and all the loftiness of the 1980s and the people's ordinary lives were consumed in a new round of art upheavals. Chinese contemporary art after 1989 and its institutional significance will be another large and revealing theme to be explored. The question that must be asked is, again: When and how will the masses of Chinese people be invited to engage in the endless revolutions and transformations of their culture?

¹⁸ Walker, Richard, and Daniel Buck. “The Chinese Road: Cities in the Transition to Capitalism.” *New Left Review* 46, July-August 2007. Online. http://www.newleftreview.org/?page=article&view=2678#_edn1.

Introduction

Difficult economic times are trying for all businesses, but cultural institutions, so often financially dependent on granting organizations, as well as tourist and leisure dollars, are frequently the first to feel the effects. When economic panic sets in, there is the risk of submitting to demands by sponsors, granting organizations, audiences, or other players that may endanger the mandate of the institution. Responsible arts administration therefore requires the creation of serious, well-thought out policies that protect institutions from opportunistic bodies. One of the most important policies for any museum or gallery is one that contends with the possibility of censorship. However, all too often institutions (perhaps fearfully) neglect creating a formal policy, instead making decisions regarding censorship on a case-by-case basis. This study demonstrates that this is an imprudent strategy, as the immense and quick pressure on an institution to act can result in foolhardy decisions. Particularly during times of economic hardship when conservative sentiment tends to rise, such policies are crucial for discussing calls for censorship both outside of and within the institution. In order to make these policies effective, arts administrators need to understand censorship: why does it happen, when does it happen, and when does it make sense to submit to it? This study outlines a brief survey of censorship practice in Canada in order to emphasize the imperative to create a coherent, broadly applicable censorship policy.¹

Censorship as Cultural Practice

“Censorship,” in the truest sense of the word, is an important cultural practice that both reinforces social norms, and that attests to the presence of cultures of dissent. Francis Horibe has described the existence and recognition of these dissenting (sub-)cultures as a necessary part of effective policy-making, a catalyst for engaging a wider public, and for finding alternative solutions.² Thus censorship and dissent may mobilize groups to effect change and refine national identity in unforeseen ways.

Perhaps due to its negative, even dictatorial connotations, censorship is an aspect of self-enculturation that is rarely addressed at the policy level. Indeed, it can be perceived as a clearly oppressive force: it can close exhibitions, bring a halt to the screening of a film, take literature off the shelves of bookshops and libraries, and go so far as to decry or punish authors, audience, and participants for engaging directly with a 'censored' item. However, there is also a more subtle set of processes that may be defined as “censorship:” those that discourage certain types of speech or action by offering incentives to abide by regulations, or deterrents if one steps outside of prescribed bounds. The curious place the practice occupies as a sometimes “necessary evil” means that its implementation is rarely referred to as “censorship” by those who enact it. Labelling an action as censorship is always potentially contentious, as different players seek to identify, analyze and define the process in ways that are inherently fraught with difficulty.

Whatever its forms, censorship attempts to normalize society, situating it within a core of acceptable political thought and morality. This does not insinuate that this “acceptability” is sanctioned by a majority of people, or even that there is any philosophical or legal defence for the status quo. The process can marginalize important minority voices, propping up systems of power that quash certain interests and pathologize the lifestyles of some, while institutionalizing the practises of others. The Canadian government system is no different than any other major country's system of governance; it can and will intervene when it is deemed necessary, and such intervention is sanctioned by law.

Government Intervention in Canadian Popular Culture

"The precondition for order in a liberal society is an act of the imagination: not a moral consensus or shared values, but the capacity to understand moral worlds different from our own"

– Michael Ignatieff, Historian and Liberal MP

The censorship of various media has been relatively commonplace in Canada, and far more pervasive than in the

1 For a more complete discussion of censorship policy, please see Katrina Enros, *Culturing Ourselves: Cultural Policy, Censorship, and the Canadian Identity* (MA Thesis, The School of The Art Institute of Chicago, 2008), from which this paper is extracted.

2 Monica Gattinger, “Creative Pique: On Governance and Engagement in the Cultural Sector,” *Accounting for Culture: Thinking Through Cultural Citizenship*, Ed. Caroline Andrew, Monica Gattinger, M. Sharon Jeannotte, and Will Straw (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2005), 207.

United States. Where cultural products are concerned, Canadian censors have exercised a great deal of control over film and publications, including fiction and non-fiction books, magazines, and comics. Rarely, though, has the government interceded in the world of galleries and museums. In Canada, the production of “high art” has traditionally been protected in a way that other cultural/artistic products are not. The loosening trends and amendments of various legislative powers seem to indicate a change in this regard, but new proposed legislation has demonstrated that such inclinations have not disappeared entirely.

The protection of the fine arts has traditionally been built into the federal legislation concerning censorship. State censorship usually falls under the aegis of one of four aspects of law: (i) Bill C-128 (1993) and later Bill C-292 (2004), both Amendments to the Criminal Code concerning Child Pornography; (ii) the various iterations of Memorandum D9-1-1, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency's Policy on the Classification of Obscene Material (revised as recently as February 2008); (iii) the Supreme Court of Canada's decision, *R. v. Butler* (1992), which committed to protecting the public from pornographic materials that were hateful or degrading toward women and children; (iv) the Ontario Film Classification Act (2005) (which replaced the Theatres Act), and other related provincial film review acts (see Appendices I-IV for further information). These laws and policies have been cited for the censure of a wide-variety of materials, yet all of them make exceptions for articles of artistic, literary, or scientific merit. The vagueness of these various rulings, however, makes the application of “merit” exceptionally difficult.

The problematically obscure definition of obscenity in Canada was established by the 1992 case of *Regina v. Butler*, wherein the government tried Donald Butler for the possession, display, and sale of obscene pornographic materials in the province of Manitoba. The Supreme Court of Canada's ruling focused on a section of the Criminal Code that outlawed the “undue” exploitation of sex; they set out to define what might constitute “undue,” and determined that it would have to include anything that degrades women. *R. v. Butler* has been criticized in particular because its definition of obscenity remains unclear, as does its claim to be able to concretely address societal ills. The question remains: does the outlawing of materials hateful to women actually reduce harm in society? The following sections review how the aforementioned laws and policies have applied to federal intervention in the arts and culture, particularly in film and publications.

Censorship and Literature

The interception of publications has been pervasive in Canada, and has taken place both at public institutions, and private, commercial enterprises. Two government bodies are generally responsible for these censorships: local and provincial police forces, and Canada Customs.³ The seizure of goods and objects is normally justified on the basis of obscenity. However, censorship is often the result of subjective and arbitrary decision making, based on systematic stereotyping of certain establishments, or a lack of context and experience surrounding the images. Legal challenges to acts of censorship reveal that the censors trampled upon the rights guaranteed by the Charter, primarily the first section that addresses freedom of expression, and the cases lacked the basic qualities necessary to prohibit sale or use.

However, today, quite frequently it is not only *text*, but also images that are deemed “immoral or indecent.” The adult monthly magazine *Penthouse* has been held at the border, strangely not for the “usual [...] line-up of seductive nude young women in various stages of enticement, including the now-standard crotch shots and simulated masturbation,” but for the publication of ancient Japanese and Hindu depictions of sex, including work from the *Kama Sutra*.⁴ The images were reproduced as part of an article reviewing work shown at the 1983 New York Art Expo. The magazine's publisher was forced to place black dots over all of the offending genitalia, or lose the profits of a then-half-a-million Canadian circulation.

Comic books are also frequently held and destroyed for similar sexually-graphic (but notably, not violent) images. *Penthouse Comix*, an adult-themed comic book published by the makers of *Penthouse Magazine*, was refused entry at the border because of perceived “degradation” in the work. The editor of the comic, George Caragone, vented his frustration: “...to censor a comic book is particularly absurd. Comics are by definition farcical. [...]The panels] in no way could be said to 'degrade or dehumanize' any of the participants. They are purely cartoon characters and nothing more.”⁵ The “Meatman” comics, featuring gay-sadomasochistic practises, have also regularly been stopped at the border. Mark Laliberté, the teenage publisher of an underground comic 'zine, had his work seized by police after complaints by parents of fellow high

3 Parents' groups and school boards are frequently behind book challenges within elementary and secondary schools. As these questions generally concern the appropriateness of literature for a child, or their educational value as a part of the overall curricula, they fall outside the scope of this paper.

4 William French, “Penthouse's black dots a black mark for censor,” *The Globe and Mail*, May 3, 1983.

5 Charles Trueheart, “Canada Closes its Border to Penthouse Comic Book,” *The Washington Post*, June 28, 1994, A24.

school students. According to Val Ross, his ultimate acquittal was the first test of the parameters set by *R. v. Butler*.⁶

One of the most memorable instances of literary censorship in Canada was a series of border patrol seizures during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The seizures primarily concerned alternative bookstores, which catered to the LGBT community, and in some instances, feminist audiences at "women's bookstores." Little Sister's of Vancouver, British Columbia (and later, other alternative bookstores) contended that they were systematically discriminated against, and that border patrol officers were deeming material obscene simply because it depicted sexual acts outside of the norm. The only recourse after a book had been deemed obscene was to file an appeal after being served with a Notice of Detention and Determination. Appeals were often lengthy and sometimes expensive processes. As a result, small retailers infrequently filed them and Customs, in more than one instance, destroyed the books before the response deadline.

Little Sister's Bookstore in Vancouver, British Columbia has been one of the most persistent and assertive litigants in the ongoing fight against government censorship. Little Sister's took their case to the courts after several infuriating events. Material they had ordered from the United States was not only destroyed at the border, before they had a chance to register their appeal, but other shipments of the same materials were allowed to make their way to larger, "big box" bookstores. A Canadian customs official carelessly threw a bag of detained shipments into their stairwell; the books inside were damaged. The detainment of *The Advocate*, a mainstream LGBT magazine available at most book and magazine retailers, and which contained virtually no sexual content, turned out to be the linchpin they needed. It was, in the words of the B.C. Civil Liberties Association's director, "...an opportunity to attack the constitutionality of the obscenity provisions themselves."⁷

Books on their way to Glad Day, the first gay and lesbian bookstore in Canada, seem to have committed no offence other than to be on their way to this particular bookstore; their shipments were systematically detained, despite no discernible obscenity. American scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Tendencies* and *Fat Art, Thin Art* were detained by the Border Patrol in 1995. Its delivery had been timed to coincide with a visit by the author to Glad Day bookstore in Toronto, and though it was eventually released two weeks after the visitation date, no reason for its detainment was ever given. Jane Rule's book *The Young One in Another's Arms*, though available at bookstores across Canada, was also detained (and eventually released, no reason given) on its way to Glad Day. David Leavitt's *A Place I've Never Been*, a short-story collection with very little sexual content, was also detained on its way to the book store.⁸ Even the famous 19th-century work by poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, readily available in virtually every major bookstore, was detained.⁹

Though LGBT bookstores take on a disproportionate amount of the censorship imposed by Customs, they are not the only bookstore that suffered. *The Gauntlet*, a respectable magazine devoting an issue to the analysis of censorship, was also seized because it contained images and excerpts from materials formerly seized (and later released) by the Canadian border patrol.¹⁰ The absurd misapplication of law also touched Andrea Dworkin's own *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* and *Woman Hating*, both feminist treatises on the oppressive nature of pornographic materials on their way to Le Dernier Mot bookstore in Montreal (though both books were released after only a brief detention).¹¹ *The Gauntlet* and Dworkin titles are particularly ironic examples, but many other seized books, though they sometimes contain sexual or violent details, are rarely obscene and usually ascribed serious literary value by peers, critics, and other professionals in the

6 Val Ross, "A Significant obscenity judgment," *The Globe and Mail*, June 23, 1992.

7 Kirk Makin, "This case . . . is out of control'; After spending \$500,000 and 10 years fighting the government,; the owners of a gay bookstore in B.C. would do it again.; 'Customs was taking so much of our material that we were; going out of business,' said Janine Fuller on her battle; to stop Customs seizing the shop's material.; Did they win? Sort of." *The Globe and Mail*, April 8, 2002, A6.

8 Hough, Robert, "Seizing books degrading Customs Canada still labours under the Victorian notion that viewing certain publications can make a person evil, mad, criminal, and hairy-palmed. Accompanying this conviction is the belief that someone, somewhere, must prevent us from reading such material," *The Globe and Mail*, February 12, 1994.

9 Ibid.

10 Philip Marchand, "Censorship," *The Toronto Star*, July 14, 1990, M1.

11 Albert Nerenberg, "Fear not, brave Canadian, Customs stands on guard for thee," *The Gazette (Montreal, Quebec)*, January 22, 1993.

field, and *Le Dernier Mot* carries no pornographic titles in its stores.¹²

Little Sister's decided to challenge the seizure of publications, and took its case to the courts in 1990. The bookstore lost its first major court battle in 1994, and its second one in 2000, but finally made its way to Canada's Supreme Court in 2004.¹³ Not only did the organization assert that Border Patrol officers should not have the authority to seize books, but that federal law (the aforementioned *Butler* decision) was by necessity biased against gay erotica, and that a separate standard of values was necessary. In 2000, "The federal government contend[ed] that if Customs officials lose the power to regulate what material can cross the border, the country will be flooded with obscenity."¹⁴ In 2004, the Supreme Court agreed in a majority consensus that the system was broken, and the Little Sister's constitutional rights had been violated.

Indeed, as all of the Supreme Court judges noted, it is questionable whether a model of border censorship devised in the 19th century is worth retaining at all. In the age of the Internet, is it still worth devoting resources to the interception of expressive material at mail depots and border crossings? Should the state ever be able to suppress books before proving its case beyond a reasonable doubt in a criminal trial?¹⁵

Customs Canada was ordered to put an end to their strictures, but whether or not they have come to end is debatable. Little Sister's has contended that the incidents go on, and demanded the right to advanced federal funding in order to pursue continued legal action against the government. The Supreme Court ruled that the store could not have access to these funds, because its case was too narrow, and did not apply to a broad enough sector of the population. Commenting on the Court's requirement that funding only be provided in "rare and exceptional" circumstances law professor Brenda Cossman noted, "This was an action involving an unrelenting censor [Canada Customs] with whom Little Sister's had been battling for 12 years - and they were operating in defiance of a Supreme Court order. If this case wasn't exceptional, I don't know what is."¹⁶ In their dissenting opinion, Justices Binnie and Fish emphatically disagreed with the Court's decision, "It is 12 years into [the litigation process]. . . . Given that 70 per cent of Customs detentions are of gay and lesbian material, there is unfinished business of high public importance left over from Little Sister's No. 1. The public has an interest in whether its government respects the law and operates in relation to its citizens in a non-discriminatory fashion."¹⁷ For many, the loss of this case, and the continued disdain for the Supreme Courts orders, signalled that such censorship would never end. Little Sister's has since announced that they will no longer pursue legal action, and the owners are looking to sell the business.

Film Censorship in Canada

Film censorship has a long history Canada. Past debates have largely centred around the power of boards to edit or delete content outright. Ironically, the presence of these boards has made film censorship one of the best documented aspects of censorship in the country. As time has gone on, most of the Canadian provinces have done away with "censor boards," and remodelled them as "review boards," whose sole purpose is to apply rating systems. Censorship is still permitted when a film is "pornographic," and it is here that many troubles still arise; debates over what qualifies a film as pornographic, or *strictly* pornographic, continue.

Early examples of Canadian prudishness abound in the State's unusual censorship choices: the British Columbia censor board banned *Mickey's Follies* (a 1929 Mickey Mouse cartoon) and the Marx Brothers' films for being too silly, and *The Woman that God Forgot*, because God would not forget a woman.¹⁸ The Alberta Censor Board banned a nine-minute

12 Ibid.

13 Little Sister's v. Canada (Minister of Justice), [1996.] No. A901450, Supreme Court of British Columbia
Little Sister's v. Canada (Minister of Justice), [1998] B.C. Court of Appeal
Little Sister's v. Canada (Minister of Justice), [2000] 2 S.C.R. 1120, Supreme Court of Canada
Little Sister's v. Canada (Minister of Justice), [2007] 1 S.C.R. 38, 2007 SCC 2, Supreme Court of Canada

14 Janice Tibbetts, "'A different kind of erotica': Gay materials require separate measure for obscenity, top court told," *The Ottawa Citizen*, May 17, 2000.

15 Brenda Cossman and Bruce Ryder. "Court was too lenient in B.C. censorship case," *The Toronto Star*, December 24, 2000.

16 Kirk Makin, "Top Court Denies Cash for Little Sister's Case," *The Globe and Mail*, January 20, 2007, A6.

17 Ibid.

18 Lyle Jenish, "Censored: From Mickey Mouse to the Marx Brothers; Professor's research reveals a disturbing history in British Columbia of material being banned for political reasons," *The Globe and Mail*, April 30,

documentary, *A Message from Our Sponsor*, a critique of sexism sponsored by the National Film Board (NFB),¹⁹ while Ontario banned the Cannes award-winning *Tin Drum*. Nova Scotia even banned *All Quiet on the Western Front*, because it was undertaking an army recruitment project at the time. These historical cases of censorship are, of course, outdated by contemporary standards, but even decisions made since the inception of the Charter often appear priggish. *Léolo*, a Quebec-made film sponsored by the NFB, and cited by TIME magazine as one of the greatest 100 films of all times, was banned by the province of Alberta. Though ultimately overturned on an appeal, the Saskatchewan censor board's decision to bar the comedy *Exit to Eden* created enough public embarrassment that the government ultimately dismantled the ban.²⁰ Most provinces have gone the way of Saskatchewan, and either eliminated their censor boards, or transformed them into classification boards. Problems remain in Ontario, however. Recent films, such as *Fat Girl* (2001), *Baise-Moi* (2000), and *Sex and Lucia* (2001), have all been censored in Ontario. More recent decisions to allow the screening of potentially difficult films like *Shortbus* (2006), seem to indicate a turn, but a long history of controversial acts of censorship make the likelihood that will remain true unsure.

Ontario long ago set-up a distinction between “high art” films, and “low art” movies. The battle to limit the Ontario Film Censor Board's (OFCB) powers started in the early 1980s. Artists and the OFCB clashed when the use of film as an artistic medium (i.e., produced especially for viewing in galleries and museums), became relatively pervasive. In 1975, the OFCB was granted aegis over art galleries exhibiting videotapes and Super-8 film. As per Ontario law, films had to be vetted by the board, then recommended changes applied, in order to permit public screening. Artist groups argued that the work screened in galleries should not be subjected to the same regulations, because they had different audiences, purposes, and screening locales, and they were already vetted “as art” by curators and directors. To suggest changes to an artistic work would be to question the authority of the artist.

The first art centre to defy the Censor Board was Toronto's Funnel Film Theatre in 1980, which openly advertised its intent to publicly show unapproved films. In 1981 the Images Film Festival (then screened in Peterborough, but now based in Toronto) defied section 58 of the Theatres Act (1953) by showing unvetted films in a public setting. As charges were laid against them, the editors of *FUSE* magazine held yet another public screening of unapproved films in solidarity. Mary Brown, the Censor Board's then-Director, claimed that like all censorship policy in Canada, the board's activities were justified by the concept of “community standards.” According to Mary Brown, “[Film censorship] is recognized as a popular policy [...] 70 percent of the people in Ontario want film censorship, so I would say that a responsible government should give it to them.” Yet a curator at the Art Gallery of Ontario, one of Canada's larger galleries, admitted that her institution often received preferential treatment, and was often not subject to the same limitations as other galleries in the province.²¹ At the trial of four defendants from Artspace/Canadian Images Film Festival, the Defence established that “the Ontario Censor Board had not exercised its power over film gauges below 35 mm in its history, nor indeed to its jurisdiction over video screening in public.”²² The Ontario Divisional Court plainly decided that the Film Censor Board's activities were now in violation of the newly ratified Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. They instead became the “Ontario Film Review Board” (OFRB), but it did virtually nothing to stop them from continuing censorship activities.

In August 1988, the Censor Board finally lost the ability to review films scheduled for display in galleries, public libraries, or schools, as well as film festivals, as long as the intended audience was over 18. While the gallery and school exception was a major win for artists and academics, it did little for more mainstream cinematic releases, whose “art” was not protected because of its venue. The case against the independent French film *Fat Girl* was so egregious that it prompted two of Canada's most powerful corporate law firms to offer their services in defence of the film *pro bono*. *Fat Girl* was permitted to be screened in every Canadian province where there was a willing distributor, every province that is, but Ontario. The OFRB objected to the frank depiction of underage sex, although all of those scenes involved actors over the age of 18. Attorney Craig Martin came prepared with a small artillery of legal precedent that clearly showed the unconstitutional nature of the film's censorship; their victory seemed assured. Realizing their position, the OFRB allowed the film to be released. Though on the surface the admittance seems like a win, it allowed the OFRB to evade constitutional challenge.

2007, A8.

19 “Alberta bans film on sexism,” *The Globe and Mail*, February 12, 1981.

20 “Sask. censors out,” *The Montreal Gazette*, September 17, 1997, A14.

21 Zsuzsi Gartner, “Panel members relate censorship encounters,” *The Globe and Mail*, May 28, 1985.

22 Clive Robertson, “Contestations and Legal Mobilizations,” *Policy Matters: Administrations of Art and Culture* (Toronto: YYZBooks, 2006), 45-46.

It was actually the legal actions of the previously-cited Glad Day bookstore, which also happens to carry videos, that forced a change in the film review board's policies. In 2000 Glad Day challenged the OFRB in court, condemning their practices after they seized the un-reviewed film *Descent*, and charged the owner. In 2004, the provincial courts agreed that their powers were "overly broad." The presiding judge noted in particular that the previous exceptions to the Theatre Act, which granted special permissions to art galleries, libraries, schools, and film festivals, did not make sense. No evidence existed, so far as he could see, that the OFRB was correct in its assumption that the audiences present in those venues were "more sophisticated" than the general public. He gave the government one year to change its unconstitutional policies. After one year, the government tabled a new bill, labelled by Glad Day's lawyer as, "...a new coat of paint on the old powers and presented [...] as new legislation."²³ The Canadian Civil Liberties Association also claimed that the bill had "'mysterious' provisions that appear to recreate the very powers that were struck down by the court."²⁴ Glad Day, just like Little Sister's, fed up with the seemingly unending process and exorbitant costs, announced that they would no longer take up any censorship battles. Nonetheless, what at times can be difficult, embarrassing, and either ignored by small retailers or swept under the carpet by larger chain stores, has ironically gained enormous public exposure.

In the previous two sections we have seen that government intervention in the dissemination of films and literature has been frequent. The concerned works have often veered from standard definitions of sexuality, and typically come from places outside of Canada; most of the exporters are book publishers and film distributors from the United States, where the products are legal. Canadian government intervention has often been deemed inappropriate and in violation of the Charter by the provincial and federal courts. The Canadian government has thus demonstrated an intolerance for a wide-variety of "commercial," cultural products, while most of these products remain perfectly legal and tolerated within the United States.

The Rarity of Government Intervention into the Visual Arts

There are probably more total instances of censorship in Canada than could be compiled into any reasonable-sized tome, but the instances of government intervention into the visual arts are few. Some examples discussed here highlight the more pressing problems for censorship in the visual arts. Though "personal discretion" decisions happen at the level of government, procedures are such that inexcusable behaviour at this level is more easily challenged, and has been, without the long, protracted battles experienced by organizations like Glad Day and Little Sister's. When government intervenes in the business of museums and galleries, citizens cry "censorship" without hesitancy, because it is perceived as an infringement upon rights guaranteed by the Charter. Such is the case with the artist Eli Langer.

Eli Langer was charged with making obscene material, possession of child pornography, and exposing obscene material to the public, on December 21, 1993. This was less than a week after 35 of his drawings and five paintings were seized from an exhibition at the Mercer Union Gallery in Toronto. Two days later, the director of the gallery, Sharon Brooks, was also charged. Langer's series depicted children and teenagers, often in different stages of undress, sometimes engaged in a sexual act. The exhibition's press release explores some of the issues: "Langer's work focuses on the tender and often abject aspects of sexuality and intimacy [...] exploring the phenomenon of intimacy where it exists without the compensation of social or cultural consent. [...] Langer often boldly develops a sexual ambiguity that inadvertently addresses our cultural taboos and the formation of morality."²⁵

No live models or other images of real children were used to create the works. More than one art reviewer found the works difficult to view, and the general opinion of the show, if not scathing, was less-than-favorable.²⁶ The consensus among art reviewers seemed to nonetheless be that though the handling of the subject matter might have been somewhat sophomoric, Langer showed promise as an artist.

It was one of these art reviews, by critic Kate Taylor in Canada's *Globe and Mail*, that prompted some readers to complain about the exhibition, although most readers hadn't actually seen the works.²⁷ The Toronto Metro Police's Morality

23 Katie Rook, "Gay bookshop gives up the fight; Repeated legal battles have cost business more than \$1-million over 30 years," *The Globe and Mail*, January 25, 2005, A10.

24 Kirk Makin, "Reviving film censorship defies courts, group says; CCLA to oppose extension of grace period arising from Glad Day Bookstore ruling," *The Globe and Mail*, April 14, 2005, A14.

25 "Eli Langer," *Digital Archives of Mercer Union: 1979-1995*, <http://www.mercerunion.org/archive95/348.html>.

26 Christopher Hume, "Offensive, and porn not always the same thing," *The Toronto Star*, December 26, 1993, E7.

Kate Taylor, "Eli Langer: Show Breaks Sex Taboo," *The Globe and Mail*, December 14, 1993.

27 Kate Taylor, "SPECTATOR Don't shoot the messenger ... or arrest the artist," *The Globe and Mail*, December

Squad²⁸ seized the work without a warrant. It was the first instance of anyone being charged under Canada's new child pornography law, granted by amendment to the Criminal Code known as Bill C-128.²⁹ The law, which did include a vague provision for the exclusion of works with "artistic merit," left no means for determining what constitutes this merit, and left the onus on the defender to do so. The Toronto Metro Police seemed prepared to both deny that artistic merit should have any bearing, and even if it did, that these works could be considered "art": "It's a firm belief at our end (that) artistic merit is no excuse, no defence. [...] In this case, an examination was done and opinions were made almost instantly - it was that blatant to anyone we exposed (the exhibit) to - it was not art," stated John Ferguson, one of the morality squad officers.³⁰

Charges against Langer and Brooks were eventually dropped, but the charges remained against the paintings themselves. A series of well-known Canadian art personages were brought to court in order to testify that the works qualified as art, among them, artist Michael Snow, contemporary art dealer Avrom Isaacs, and the aforementioned Christopher Hume. Once their artistic merit was established, and the point reinforced that these were *imagined* images of a disturbing thing, not the thing itself, the judge was compelled to agree that the works were not pornographic. Similar arguments have struck down such laws in the United States Supreme and Appellate courts, but the same flaw failed to overturn the law in Canada.

A related case, albeit with far less fanfare, involved the exhibition of Canadian artist Lyla Rye's work at eyelevelgallery in Halifax, Nova Scotia. *Byte* (2002) examined the relationship between a mother and daughter: Rye videotaped herself singing into the mouth of her child, resulting in an unusual image of mouth-to-mouth contact between mother and daughter. The piece ends just after the frustrated baby bites her mother's mouth. After two complaints, the Halifax vice squad arrived at the gallery on July 10, 2002, and demanded the videotapes from the director, who complied. Though the work had previously been exhibited in a small town in Ontario without incident, complaints made by two teenage viewers were taken seriously enough to keep the tape away from the gallery for the remaining duration of the show. No charges were laid against Rye, but she was warned that they likely would be if she attempted to show it again.³¹ She did show it again, without incident, at YYZ Gallery in 2003. The work is currently publicly accessible on the Centre for Canadian Contemporary Art's Canadian Art Database.³²

These anecdotes reveal instances in which the government (represented through police morality squads) is willing to intervene. Langer and Rye both stepped into the tumultuous waters of childhood sexuality, a subject considered so taboo, that few artists are willing to broach it, and the government is unwilling to risk perceived inaction on their part. The reasons for the outrage over the works seem clear enough: societal norms oppose the sexual exploitation of 'children' (i.e. anyone under the age of 18). In Langer's case, no actual children were involved in the making of the work, and there is no proof of an attempt to appeal to prurient interests; the Rye piece did have a real child, but a sexual relationship is neither explicit nor implied, so any interpretation as such would be imposed by the viewer. In both cases, the combined requirements for the criminal code to apply, that it involve children *and* be pornographic, were not present. The concern of this study is less with whether or not the works deserved to experience government intervention, but with the curious fact that the state felt compelled to do so. As demonstrated above, government censorship has been common, but it has almost always concerned products that are widely, publicly disseminated. Since it is clear that the government is, for the most part, willing to leave the fine arts to those who work within the arts community, one might wonder what has made the arts community worthy of such "trust." The likely explanation is that, as stated earlier, art institutions are believed to have a small, sophisticated

24, 1993.

28 The Toronto Metropolitan Police Force's self-described morality squad has since been renamed with various other euphemisms, particularly the "Special Investigations Unit." Journalists and authors tend to continue to refer to it as the morality squad in order to draw parallels to its previous investigations, and to remain clear about the squad's mandate, which continues to focus on the prosecution of sexually-based crimes, gambling, and drugs.

29 Kate Taylor, "Child-porn law used for first time Toronto artist charged after police seize five paintings, 35 drawings," *The Globe and Mail*, December 22, 1993.

30 Hume 1993.

31 Hanna Deirdre, "Art out of reach," *The Toronto Star*, July 21, 2002.

32 Centre for Canadian Contemporary Art, "Lyla Rye: Byte," *The Canadian Art Database*, http://www.ccca.ca/artists/media_detail.html?languagePref=en&mkey=53088&link_id=5478 (April 19, 2008)

audience, as opposed to pop culture items which are allegedly more widely distributed and more easily accessible. Such arguments are neither quantitatively verifiable, nor ethically responsible.

The Institution as Censor

In his preface to *Interpreting Censorship in Canada*, Allan C. Hutchinson warns readers to be careful when making assessments of Canadian censorship based on the quantity of reported incidents. Aside from the issue of a lack of thorough Canadian studies on censorship, there is also the problem of a reliance on reports that have made their way into the media. Some organizations, like Freedom to Read (a committee of the Book and Periodical Council), have started to request incident reports from the public, and are keeping statistics. No such organization does so for the visual arts. Even with this caveat in mind, however, the total number of reported incidents of intervention in the visual arts as opposed to intervention into all other aspects of cultural production, reveals such a distinct imbalance, it is clear this gap cannot be the result of a lack of reportage alone.

Institutions have frequently self-censored their own collections. This type of censorship is usually to blame in the museums and galleries of Canada: works secretly slip off walls, exhibitions are “temporarily” cancelled, and some objects are never allowed out of storage, all at the behest of the institution itself. Censorship of this variety is worrisome because there is usually no standard procedure by which it can be contested. It is impossible even to quantify how often this type of censorship occurs, let alone to judge the merit of individual instances. In this study, I will address some of the best-known cases in order to better understand its nature.

One might argue that censorship in the visual arts is rare, because the legal rights assured by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms seemingly make it difficult for the government to intercept images or information they deem inappropriate, but as we have seen demonstrated in the above, this does not necessarily hold true. The Charter in fact protects the government's ability to intercede where it deems necessary. However, it remains in the government's best interest to appear a caring sovereign, and to limit the scope of its perceived censorship to a minimum. The more that citizens perceive inequities or unjust treatment, the more likely they are to challenge the scope of certain bodies' abilities, from the Toronto Metropolitan Police (who may no longer seize evidence from a public place without a warrant, due to the Langer case), to Canadian Customs Officials (who have been forced to significantly change the language and scope of Memorandum D9-1-1). Other organizations, like the OFRB, have even dropped their charges, rather than face a limitation on their powers in court (as in the *Fat Girl* case, described above). A far better strategy is to create policy initiatives that encourage public institutions to regulate themselves.

The depiction of human sexuality is one of the censor's favourite targets in Canada. In particular, it is when these images fall outside of sanctioned, hetero-normative bounds that issues arise; prevalent examples include the depiction of teenagers as sexualized beings, the illustration of the male nude, and the representation of homosexuality. Yet similar issues arise less frequently in the space of the museum. One might argue that museums are protected by virtue of their status as government entities, but this is not so. The National Gallery of Canada and the Museum of Civilization are both *de facto* arm's length institutions, as per the 1990 Museums Act. The government therefore does not have the right to regulate museums in the same way that they would any other government department. The museum is *officially* kept to the same standards as any private corporation, but unofficially, their gaffes become the public embarrassments of the government.

In 1995, a contentious decision to cancel an exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) was deemed censorious by many. NGC claimed responsibility for the decision, though rumblings of pressure to do so by government officials were publicly aired. The exhibition in question was a series of works by Dennis Tourbin, which examined the issue of Quebec's October Crisis, an incident remembered by some as a frightening example of militant terrorism, by others as an exertion of unfair measures by the State. The exhibition was designed to occur in conjunction with the 25th anniversary of the crisis, but accidentally coincided with the proposed date for a new referendum of the question of Quebec sovereignty. The NGC's decision may have been influenced by a similar one taken by the Smithsonian Institution, who in 1994, cancelled the display of fuselage from the *Enola Gay* and other WWII paraphernalia.

The Museum of Civilization embroiled itself in a similar controversy when immediately following the events of September 11, 2001, they cancelled the exhibition *The Lands Within Me*, featuring Canadian artists of Arab-descent. The museum's claims that more time was required in order to add further context were neither well-received, nor believed. Commentator Hugh Winsor noted that, “The museum [had] shown previous exhibits on Ukrainians, Doukhobors, Vietnamese boat people and Jews...,” thus any pretence that this was an unusual situation that required special attention was unfounded.³³ Even the then-Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chrétien, condemned the museum's interference. In response to their attempts to placate an increasingly angry public by offering to relaunch the exhibit in March 2002, Chrétien said, “If it is good for March, 2002, it is good for October, 2001.”³⁴ After significant political and public pressure, the museum

33 Hugh Winsor, “The politics of art: What were they thinking?,” *The Globe and Mail*, October 1, 2001.

34 Ray Conlogue, “PM blasts museum over Arab art show,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 27, 2001, A8.

relented and opened *The Lands Within Me* on the originally planned date, October 19, 2001. The curator of the exhibition, Aida Kaouk, was promptly dismissed following the exhibition, though her contract had previously been renewed 14 times over ten years.³⁵ She filed a complaint in 2002 with Canada's Human Rights Commission, charging the museum with racism, and won.³⁶

In 2003, the Art Gallery of Hamilton (AGH), a public space in south eastern Ontario, made a decision similar to the Museum of Civilization's when it elected to "postpone" *Enduring Operation Freedom*. The exhibit, a solo show with works by artist-architect Shahid Mahmood, included mostly satirical cartoons critiquing the American invasion of Iraq. Though the curator/director Alexandria Pierce publicly claimed that the exhibition was only postponed due to a requirement to, "...develop [the work] within the context of a broader exhibition on popular culture," Mahmood asserted otherwise.³⁷ "...I got a call back from the curator saying, 'You know what? The times aren't great. I think we should save this exhibition for another time. I fear for my job. I don't think this is the proper political climate to be doing this in Hamilton right now.'"³⁸ The rather dubious claims that the work would be shown no later than 2005 turned out to be rightfully doubted: as of this date, the work has still not been exhibited at the AGH.

There are literally hundreds, if not thousands, of examples of controversial works exhibited in the halls of Canadian art institutions. They contend with virtually every controversial subject-matter one can imagine: self-mutilation in the works of Vienna Actionist Rudolf Schwarzkogler at the Musée d'art contemporain in 1991, scenes of sexual torture in the work of Tom Lapierre at the Art Gallery of Peel in 1993, the homoeroticism of Attila Richard Lukacs' work at the Musée d'art contemporain in 1995, Kent Monkman's satirical image of rape at the Harbourfront Centre in 2002, and Carol Ho's painted images of disabled children at the Red Deer and District Museum in 2003. While there are often healthy debates surrounding the exhibition of these works, and occasional reports of dissatisfaction by some members of the community, the works almost always remain in place. Upon occasion, museums take steps to shield such images from children or otherwise warn patrons of sensitive content, as with both the Ho and Monkman pieces, but calling such measures "censorship" severely diminishes the power of the word.

As the examples in this section illustrate, museums in Canada have a tendency not to react in a censorious manner simply because the work is controversial, but to react strongly when there are concerns about race, identity, and representation. The museum seems to be willing to risk the label of censor, rather than risk misrepresentation of a group. This may be related to previous, major protests that were fuelled entirely by members of the public on behalf of a minority voice: *The Spirit Sings* exhibition at the Glenbow Museum (1988) for misuse of Aboriginal artifacts, and *Into the Heart of Africa* at the Royal Ontario Museum (1989), for an offensive depiction of Africans. Representation is highly politicized in Canada, and a demonstration of "intercultural" understanding is considered a key aspect of the country's cultural policy. It seems clear that museums are unwilling to risk political backlash, and sometimes take the unfortunate misstep of censoring work. While this is hardly the fault of the Canadian government (they have actually spoken out against museum censorship on more than one occasion), it does demonstrate how anxious cultural institutions are about misrepresenting any community, particularly those that may be involved with politically-sensitive issues. They have preconditioned themselves to act in advance by closing down potentially controversial exhibitions, rather than to engage the public in dialogue and interchange.

Conclusions

Canadian censorship practice has shown a distinct pattern, quite different to that of the United States. While Americans have expressed anxiety about the ways in which the fine arts are supported and exhibited, Canadians have shown relatively less interest, with some notable exceptions: the government seems to intervene where harm toward children may be involved, and the institution itself may intervene when politically sensitive communities are concerned. Instead, the Canadian government has historically shown interest in the "popular arts," especially cinema and literature.

How do Canada's censorship practises relate to what is known about Canadian identity, as demonstrated by our values? As the prohibitive end of cultural policy, it aims to produce a certain type of Canadian citizen, just as all other

35 Janice Tibbetts, "Dismissed Arab curator calls museum racist: Human rights complaint: Syrian-Canadian led controversial Arab art exhibit after Sept. 11," *The National Post*, November 26, 2002, A2.

36 Ray Conlogue, "Some felt the show was derailed; With the Museum of Civilization's decision not to tour a controversial show of Muslim-Canadian art, artists are charging bias," *The Globe and Mail*, July 5, 2003, R9.

37 Christian Cotroneo, "Cartoon critique of Iraq war kept under wraps," *The Toronto Star*, November 4, 2003, A16.

38 Ibid.

cultural policies do. Canada is perceived as a democratic state where rights are protected, and censorious actions are relatively rare, but as we have seen, the country is by no means completely free of such activity. There has historically been a deep divide between the censorship of cultural products that might be designated as “popular,” or “consumer-oriented,” and those that are considered “fine art.” Canadian government interventions and élitist divisions between “high” and “low” art are simply outdated institutions that require a rapprochement in order to put an end to inequities. While this survey demonstrates these general trends, it cannot predict what exhibitions or individual works of art will court controversy in the future. Understanding the government, Canadian citizens, the needs of granting organizations, and a given institution's own mandate are all essential for creating a lasting policy that appropriately addresses everyone's needs.

War and times of crisis devastate lands, dissolve governments, and disenfranchise citizens. Aggressors employ tactics intended to crush national symbols and destroy aspects of cultural life that might serve as historical reminders or unifying forces. In 1992, the newly formed Serbian army, under the leadership of Slobodan Milosevic, laid siege to Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, killing thousands and making rubble of cherished cultural artifacts and architecture across the city. As a place where ethnically diverse groups had coexisted peacefully for centuries, the four-year siege leveled the city both physically and spiritually. However, these acts, aimed at oppressing Sarajevans and eradicating their cultural history, generated a revolutionary cultural spirit and gave rise to new cultural organizations, notably the Ars Aevi Project. As this paper will demonstrate, through the development of a situation-specific operational model, Ars Aevi is a keen example of innovative arts administration at work. I will begin with a short history of Bosnia and an overview of the 1990s conflict, and then will discuss the creation of Ars Aevi from a museological perspective, including its development, organizational model, projects, and potential future. I will conclude by addressing some of the problems Ars Aevi has faced, discuss the reproducibility of its model, and speculate about the organization's underlying motivations and concerns.

Sarajevo: A Brief Social and Political History

Throughout Sarajevo's history, the city has been known for its culturally diverse population. Founded in the 1400s by a Muslim Slav governor of the Ottoman Empire, during the four hundred years that followed, Catholics, Muslims, and Eastern Orthodox Christians settled in the region.¹ After Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain expelled the Jews from their country in 1492, this group took up residence in the city as well. Sarajevo became a place where architectural styles, diverse languages, and a multiplicity of faiths coexisted in the streets and marketplaces of daily life. In the late 1800s, the Austro-Hungarian Empire took control of Bosnia, bringing new European tastes and traditions to the city.²

Shortly thereafter, the 1914 assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the likely heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and his wife by a Serb nationalist in Sarajevo led to the beginning of World War I. Bosnia then separated from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and joined with what would become Yugoslavia after 1929. Censuses show that during this period, Bosnia-Herzegovina was the most ethnically mixed of all the Yugoslavian republics.³ Political power was roughly equal between Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), and all citizens had uniform rights.⁴ Though regime change and violence between factious groups are formative aspects of Bosnia's larger history, the city of Sarajevo maintained a delicately balanced system of cultural and religious integration, with diverse groups living, working, and worshipping side-by-side⁵ as the nation transitioned to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1943, remaining Communist until the dissolution of the Republic in 1992.

Although the Soviet-allied nation remained relatively neutral during the Cold War, with the death of the Communist leader Tito in 1980, tensions between the six republics (which included Bosnia-Herzegovina) began to escalate, nationalism within the republics grew, and political leaders who operated

¹ Matjaz Klemencic and Mitja Zagar, *The Former Yugoslavia's Diverse Peoples* (Oxford: ABC Clío, 2004).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid 314.

⁴ Ibid 312.

⁵ Andras Riedlmayer notes "In the commercial center of Sarajevo we see the principal mosque, the Sephardic synagogue, the old Orthodox church, and the somewhat newer Roman Catholic cathedral, all located practically adjacent to each other within an area of less than half a square kilometer"; Andras Riedlmayer, "Bosnia's Multicultural Heritage and its Destruction," transcript of slide presentation given at the Symposium on Destruction and Rebuilding of Architectural Treasures in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., May 2, 1994). Web edition, <http://www.kakarigi.net/manu/ceip2.htm> (21 December 2009) 4.

along ethnic and religious lines began to mobilize. The Bosnian War officially broke out as Slobodan Milosevic (who came to power with the Republic of Serbia in 1989, concurrent with the fall of the Soviet Union) began using military force against other groups, including Croats, ethnic Albanians, Slovenes, and most dramatically, Bosniaks⁶ to enforce his vision of Serbian control. The war in Bosnia, which lasted from 1992 until 1995, devastated the region and hugely altered the ethnic structure of the former republic(s), shifting from a historically multicultural population to discrete regions (and eventually new countries) characterized by ethnic homogeneity.⁷

When Serbian tanks and soldiers took control of the hills surrounding Sarajevo, their goal was focused and strategic: to take control of the city through the elimination of non-Serb (non-Orthodox) residents, and to level historical/cultural representations of these groups. Andras Riedlmayer, a leading academic of Bosnian history, relates this anecdote regarding the cultural specificity, and focused intent of the Serb attacks:

In September 1992, BBC reporter Kate Adie interviewed Serbian gunners on the hillsides overlooking Sarajevo and asked them why they had been shelling the Holiday Inn, the hotel where all of the foreign correspondents were known to stay. The Serbian officer commanding the guns apologized profusely to Ms. Adie, explaining they had not meant to hit the hotel but had been aiming at the roof of the National Museum behind it.⁸

The first buildings to be shelled were the Gazi Husrev-Beg Mosque, built in the 16th century, an important piece of Ottoman architecture; the Church of St. Joseph⁹; the Sarajevo National Library (Vijecnica), a Moorish-revival building from the 1890s that was home to the country's national archives and hundreds of thousands of books, periodicals, and newspapers; and the Oriental Institute, southeastern Europe's preeminent archive of Islamic, Jewish, and Ottoman documents.¹⁰

Prior to the siege, Sarajevo had a thriving community of museums, including the National Museum of Bosnia-Herzegovina; the Historical Museum of Bosnia-Herzegovina; the Museum of the City of Sarajevo; the Museum of the XIV Winter Olympics (used as a space for contemporary art); the Art Museum of Bosnia-Herzegovina; and the Collegium Artisticum Gallery, among others.¹¹ All of these institutions suffered severe shelling, which led to architectural and collections damage from fire, water, weather conditions, inadequate storage facilities, and looting. Additionally, income, funding, outside aid, and basic resources for the museums were unavailable or limited during the war, and resulted in severe cuts in institutional staffing and operations as cultural institutions took a backseat to pressing issues of survival.¹²

Cultural Resilience and the Ars Aevi Project

Almost immediately after the Serbian forces surrounded Sarajevo, troops cut off much of what was necessary for everyday survival, from water and food, to fuel, medicine, and electricity.¹³ The constant threat of sniper fire and shelling, coupled with the harsh Bosnian winters, severely crippled those Sarajevans who chose or were forced to remain in the city. Many inhabitants, however, found a cause to motivate them during this difficult period: cultural revival. According to Enver Hadziomerspahic, founder and director of the Ars Aevi Project,¹⁴ "The cultural activity of Sarajevo, rather than being interrupted

⁶ Klemencic and Zagar 313.

⁷ Klemencic and Zagar 319.

⁸ Riedlmayer 6.

⁹ Dzevad Karahasan, *Sarajevo, Exodus of a City* (New York: Kodansha International, 1994), 26.

¹⁰ Riedlmayer 5.

¹¹ Helen Walasek and Dr Marian Wenzel, "War damage to the cultural heritage in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina," Ninth Information Report for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, PACE document (19 January 1996), web edition, 1.

¹² Walasek and Wenzel, PACE Doc. 7464, 1.

¹³ Karahasan 48.

¹⁴ The name "Ars Aevi" means "Art of the Epoch" in Latin and is also an anagram for Sarajevo.

during the siege, was in fact, more intense than ever.”¹⁵ Hadziomerspahic is referring to the creation of a number of new and lasting cultural entities inside Sarajevo during or in the aftermath of the war. These include the PEN Center (1992), part of a worldwide organization whose stated mission is “to engage with, and empower, societies and communities across cultures and languages, through reading and writing;”¹⁶ the Sarajevo Film Festival (1995), created by the Obala Art Gallery, an existing center for contemporary art in Sarajevo;¹⁷ the Sarajevo Center for Contemporary Art (1996), originally the Soros Center for Contemporary Art, founded by the Open Society Fund Bosnia-Herzegovina (a division of the Open Society Institute & Soros Foundation Network);¹⁸ and the Sarajevo Jazz Festival (1996)¹⁹.

Founded during the early months of the war, the Ars Aevi Project was a leader in this cultural uprising. Initially conceived of by a group of intellectuals (arts administrators, artists, and academics) who came together shortly after the onset of the siege, the project, then called Sarajevo 2000, was formed with the goal of becoming a “unique museum, one which will, even in its initial steps, announce the superiority of spirit and art over the forces of evil and destruction.”²⁰ The group aimed to reach out to international contemporary artists who they hoped would connect with the project based on the “conviction that the artists of this age feel and understand the injustice done to our city.”²¹

With little money or resources, Hadziomerspahic and his team began to formulate a structure for the project that was unlike other contemporary art initiatives of the time. They began with two agendas: to build networks with other European contemporary art institutions, and to receive donations of groups of artwork that would come together to form their collection.²² With support from representatives of the City of Sarajevo, the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina’s Public Fund for Culture, and the (acting) Government of Bosnia-Herzegovina, word spread rapidly throughout the arts communities of Europe and partnerships began to take shape.²³

Ars Aevi: Model and Implementation

The organizational structure from 1993 – 1999 (which I will refer to as Stage One²⁴) could be

¹⁵ Enver Hadziomerspahic, “The International Cultural Project ARS AEVI- Museum of Contemporary Art – Sarajevo,” *Sarajevo2000: Schenkungen von Kunstlern fur ein neues Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung and Ars Aevi (International Cultural Project of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sarajevo)*, (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 1999), 27-40, 28.

¹⁶“International PEN About Us.” 2008. <http://www.internationalpen.org.uk/go/about-us> (6 January 2010).

¹⁷The Obala Art Gallery, created in 1984, started out as a small space for contemporary and avant-garde art. After gaining much positive attention in the 1980s, they renovated a large space, hoping to expand their programming. The new building, completed in April of 1992, was burned to the ground by Serb forces less than one month after it opened; Jamey Gambrell, "Sarajevo: art in extremis - art from Bosnia-Herzegovina - Kunsthalle, New York, New York - Cover Story". *Art in America*. 1994. FindArticles.com. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1248/is_n5_v82/ai_15406242 (27 Nov. 2008).

¹⁸“About Sarajevo Center for Contemporary Art.” 2008. http://www.scca.ba/e_about.htm (21 December 2009).

¹⁹ “Jazzfest Sarajevo – International Music Festival.” 2009. <http://www.jazzfest.ba/> (21 December 2009).

²⁰Enver Hadziomerspahic, “Generalna koncepcija” (“General Concept”), in *Arts Aevi Catalogue of the Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art (1994-1997)* (Sarajevo: Ars Aevi, 1999, 4th ed.), 10-11.

²¹ *Ibid*, 10.

²²Edin Hajdarpasic, “The Remaking of Postwar Sarajevo,” in *(Re)Visualizing National History*, ed. Robin Ostow (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 121.

²³Enver Hadziomerspahic, *Ars Aevi Collection 1992 – 2003* (Sarajevo: Ars Aevi, 2003), 20.

²⁴For these purposes, I consider “Stage One” to be the period of initial action of the project, with nearly all activities taking place outside of Sarajevo. “Stage Two” begins with the first presentation in Bosnia of what was then the whole collection. It also marks the initial launch into the Ars Aevi World Campaign with the announcement that Renzo Piano would design the museum for free. See the chronology on

www.arsaevi.ba.

visualized as having the Ars Aevi Collection (the managing body) acting as a central nucleus, around which participating European contemporary art centers became satellite particles. During Stage One, six European cities (Milan, Prato, Ljubljana, Sarajevo itself, Venice, and Vienna) took on this satellite role. This meant that a curator or institution would organize an exhibition of a group of artists, and following its close, those artists would donate their work to the central Ars Aevi Collection. While the response was overwhelming, and well-known artists such as Anish Kapoor, Franz West, Juan Muñoz, Daniel Buren, Bill Viola, and others enthusiastically donated to the cause, the limited mobility of people and goods during the siege prevented the works from being exhibited together in Sarajevo until 1999.²⁵ To counteract this obstacle, Ars Aevi utilized the satellite sites, touring the Collection to centers across Europe, awaiting the end of the Bosnian War²⁶ for the day that they would be able to present it at home.

1999 was the year that marked Stage Two of the organization's development, and ushered in new possibilities for the future of the project. Ars Aevi had begun to initiate smaller exhibitions and installations at venues in Sarajevo; however, due to lingering transportation restrictions in the region, and lack of adequate exhibition space, 1999 was the first time that they had the opportunity to present their own growing collection to Bosnians. At the opening events for the exhibition, held inside a massive space in the downtown Skenderija Center, world-renowned architect Renzo Piano announced his decision to design, for free, a series of structures that would become the Ars Aevi Complex—an inspiring gift that would allow Ars Aevi to concretely establish the museum that had been part of their initial goal.²⁷ Moving boldly into this next phase of their development, Ars Aevi began to expand their exhibition programming and delve into pedagogy, forming the Arts Aevi Forum as a locus for participant organizations to discuss future projects; finding residence/exhibition space for their objects inside the Historical Museum of Bosnia-Herzegovina in Sarajevo and subsequently mounting solo exhibitions of up-and-coming Bosnian artists, as well as artists from the Collection; and creating the Ars Aevi Open International University, featuring a series of “multicultural seminars,” as well as evening artist talks, and courses in museology.²⁸

Funding was very limited in Stage One of the project, and was based primarily on donations from the satellite institutions, as well as from Italian governmental bodies. As Stage Two got underway, however, the previously mentioned architectural and programmatic ambitions were made possible thanks to the efforts of the Ars Aevi World Campaign, overseen by the Ars Aevi Foundation.²⁹ This worldwide fundraising effort was established in 2001 with the goal of raising money for construction of the Ars Aevi Complex, of which the first component, a Piano-designed bridge connecting the old and new parts of the city, was completed in 2002.³⁰

In addition to European artists, curators, and institutions, major international organizations also became patrons, namely UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, and the European Commission, as well as the Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Earmarked funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Italy and from UNESCO specifically made the Ars Aevi Open International University possible,³¹ and additionally, for the 2003 Venice Biennale, UNESCO helped finance and house the first-ever Bosnian pavilion, organized and curated by Hadziomerspahic and Asja Mandic (also of Ars Aevi).³² During the fundraising and construction phases of the Ars Aevi museum, UNESCO Venice is providing temporary, climate-controlled storage space for the collection in Italy. To date, the Ars Aevi Collection has over 160 objects, and is continually spreading its network to include new partners, among them, Istanbul, Zagreb, Athens, Frankfurt, and other cities.

Issues and Assessments

²⁵Hajdarpasic 121.

²⁶Which came in 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Agreement.

²⁷Hadziomerspahic, *Ars Aevi Collection 1992 – 2003*, 14-15.

²⁸Ibid 18

²⁹Enver Hadziomerspahic, “Chronology 2001” Ars Aevi International Project – Official Site, 2004 <http://www.arsaevi.ba> (21 December 2009).

³⁰Ibid “Chronology 2002”

³¹Ibid “Network/Patrons”

³²Hajdarpasic, 123.

The operational model of Ars Aevi, based on the long-term goal of forming a museum for contemporary art, executed incrementally through the cooperative exhibition-donation process and worldwide fundraising initiative, and bolstered by interim curatorial and pedagogical projects, is an example of responsive, situation-specific arts administration. The successes are quantifiable, and can be seen in the international recognition the organization has received, its high-profile partnerships, the continued accumulation of donated works for its collection, and the construction currently underway on Ars Aevi's to-be-permanent location. Their activities, however, have not been immune to developmental problems. Further, for arts administrators interested in new approaches to funding and management, it is useful to consider the specificities of Ars Aevi's context and how those might impact the reproducibility of the model elsewhere.

Daily survival during the siege presented perhaps the single greatest challenge for those involved with the project, but some of the logistical complications of building an institution both during and after the war are worth noting. In 1993, well into the war, an exhibition entitled "Witnesses of Existence," organized by the Obala Art Center (with participation from Hadziomerspahic), was intended to go to the Venice Biennale to represent Bosnia-Herzegovina. During this period, however, the United Nations was tightly controlling the movement of goods in and out of the country, and would not allow the works to cross the border into Italy. A safety measure on the part of the UN, the restrictions were no doubt a disappointment for Ars Aevi, as participation in the Biennale would have been a major opportunity to showcase the project to an international audience of potential partners and funders. The exhibition eventually gained the support of a handful of UN staffers who helped secure passage for the works and the curators to install the show in New York City,³³ but it would be ten years before Bosnia would have another chance at the Biennale.

Another logistical problem arose after the Historical Museum granted Ars Aevi permission to house the art collection and Ars Aevi's offices inside the Historical Museum's building. The Historical Museum (previously the Museum of the Revolution) suffered crippling structural damage during the war, lost 75% of its staff, and needed a great deal of repairs and financing to return to operational.³⁴ Support for the museum came primarily from the poorly financed Culture Ministry, and in 2002, in an attempt to save money, the Ministry reduced overall funding for the Historical Museum and served Ars Aevi with an eviction notice, claiming the institution had not been paying its rent. Confusion arose from the fact that the Culture Ministry had for several years been a supporting member and sponsor of the Ars Aevi Project.³⁵ While any underlying issues are undocumented in the literature, such a decision is potentially indicative of larger infrastructural and communication issues at work in the period following the war.

Funding obstacles have historically been a challenge for many arts institutions. The recent worldwide economic recession, which dealt a significant blow to arts and culture institutions in the United States and abroad, can open up important questions about the current operational models in place in the West. What other models exist? Could they be applicable and effective here? As was previously described, the specific wartime circumstances of the founding of Ars Aevi led to the creation of a new model—one that was designed uniquely to overcome those conditions. However, the uniqueness of those circumstances make it useful to consider whether or not the replication of this example is problematic when placed outside of this particular context.

The Bosnian War, arguably the bloodiest in Europe since World War II, thrust the country into the international spotlight, bringing media attention not seen since the 1984 Sarajevo Olympics. Hadziomerspahic and his team grasped this opportunity to draw attention to the daily destruction of Sarajevo's culture, formulating a timely mission statement for Ars Aevi that revolved around Sarajevo's history of diversity and the purported unifying ability of diverse cultural practices.³⁶ Ars Aevi's recognition of their participation in a specific political moment that then translated into the museum's concept, demonstrates an awareness of what the media could do for their cause. As stories and images of the destruction in the city played across the world, Ars Aevi built a sense of urgency around the project: if centuries of art and culture were being wiped out, the international art community could demonstrate its

³³Gambrell 1.

³⁴Helen Walasek and Dr Marian Wenzel, "War damage to the cultural heritage in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina," Ninth Information Report for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, PACE document (19 January 1996), web edition 1.

³⁵Hajdarasic 122

³⁶From the "Ars Aevi Manifest;" Hadziomerspahic, *Ars Aevi Collection 1992 – 2003* 345.

commitment to culture vis-à-vis donations of art in the name of peace. In response, the partnerships began and the artworks started accumulating. Thus one can suggest that the model's success has partially to do with the heated moment in which it arose, along with the sense of urgency that that moment engendered, which was then transmitted to the world by the media. Perhaps for other regions in the midst of widely recognized political or social upheaval a similar opportunity could be found for activating the Ars Aevi model. It seems unlikely, though, that an organization from a politically stable area would be able to garner the media attention or emotional connection that Ars Aevi did, and thus the sense of urgency that drives contributors to take on the task of helping build the collection would be absent, and the model might fail.

Another particularity, and one that the research has yet to fully explain, was the early, significant participation in the Ars Aevi Project by the regional and national governments of Italy. Four of the first seven satellite partners were located in Italy, with four more joining since 2001. The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided funding for a number of Ars Aevi's projects, and numerous corporations from Italy have gotten involved. An Italian branch (called Ars Aevi Italy) was formed, the President and Director of which sit on the Ars Aevi Board of Trustees. While further research needs to be done to explore this relationship, without its existence, the project might not have materialized as rapidly and strongly as it did. Finding bodies and governments outside of the home city/country to fill this crucial participant-role would be a second challenge to replicating this model. And it begs the question, what, in the absence of tragedy, might motivate the financing of transnational cultural exchange?

The third and most complex factor to be considered relates to governments and economic systems that are in flux, and the social structures that they give rise to. As discussed in his book *The Expediency of Culture*, market-based democracies develop in stages, one of which involves the transformation of culture into a political commodity.³⁷ As a new democracy formed on the heels of recent communist and socialist programs, and negotiating the nationalist divisions of land brought about by the peace accords,³⁸ Ars Aevi's founders constructed their platform around the idea of multiculturalism.³⁹ Stating in their mission that the museum would "be a permanent and visible symbol of the hope that instead of separating, differences can stimulate us to find beauty and value in diversity,"⁴⁰ they hinted at a potential weaving of the cultural and political dimensions of their existence. Whereas in contemporary Western democracies the term "multicultural" has become a tool to classify individuals as part of a consumer group, and thus lost much of its impact,⁴¹ Ars Aevi could invoke this term without appearing opportunistic, coupling the post-war situation with concrete examples from the city's past. For those feeling disenfranchised by the strife between ethnic groups, Ars Aevi pushed engagement in an "intercultural dialogue"⁴² as a way to participate in rebuilding Sarajevo society and to connect with the larger European community. Once again, the Ars Aevi Project made pointed use of their specific political situation and history, which allowed their operational model to germinate, further underscoring the potential difficulty of replicating this model elsewhere.

Much scholarship exists regarding the development of museums in post-war or postcolonial societies, but a review of the literature reveals a lack of material devoted to contemporary art institutions. While issues of history-making, memory, and identity politics inform the present discourse around museums and museum development, contemporary art institutions such as Ars Aevi should be examined through a different lens. It cannot be denied that history and memory played a role in the creation of Ars Aevi, but it is neither an historical nor strictly Bosnian institution. The museum's impetus was not, for example, the erasing of communist cultural policy, or the rejection of colonial oppressors; it was not about Bosnians speaking only for Bosnians, or rewriting history with idealized memories. It was a focused effort to build an international network of partners and a collection of art at a moment when art might not have seemed a primary concern. One can speculate about the underlying motives of such a project, be they the

³⁷ George Yudice, *The Expediency of Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 165.

³⁸ It was divided as such: Bosnia Herzegovina for Bosniaks, the Republic of Serbia for Orthodox Christian Serbs, Croatia for Catholic Croats.

³⁹ Yudice, 165.

⁴⁰ Ars Aevi web, "Project" (21 December 2009)

⁴¹ Yudice, 167

⁴² From the "Ars Aevi Manifest;" Hadziomerspahic, *Ars Aevi Collection 1992 – 2003*, 345.

essentialized notions of art in Ars Aevi's mission, the need for apolitical mobilization, or the co-opting of a moment for outside gain; but for now it must remain speculation.

Conclusion

The Bosnian War was a devastating blow to the ethnic and cultural makeup of the Balkan region. It caused irreparable damage to the physical architecture of Sarajevo's cultural bodies, became a force for the people to rally against, and as is discussed in this paper, gave rise to a new generation of arts organizations. Of these, the Ars Aevi Project has been a leader, starting as a small group of Sarajevan intellectuals and building into an international network of partners, including artists, curators, institutions, and governments. While the model itself seems an unlikely candidate for application elsewhere, its simple existence indicates that institutional models need not be static. In times of political crisis or fiscal insecurity, but also in times of average growth and continuity, one final lesson that can be learned from Ars Aevi is for institutions to be attentive to their own individual specificity, finding inspiration and ideas in other models, and never denying the possibilities of innovation.

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The robust growth that has taken place in the United Arab Emirates over the last decade has been sparked by the country's desire to broaden its oil-based economy as local supply wanes and global energy interests shift. The government has focused its investment in the sectors of finance and tourism, seeking to lure international businessmen and travelers with tax havens and palm tree-shaped islands to an extravagant sanctuary at the nexus between East and West.¹ A major component of this expansion has been massive support for cultural initiatives in three of the country's seven emirates (Illus. 1), ranging from the establishment of auction houses and commercial galleries in Dubai, to an experimental biennial in Sharjah, and finally to an ambitious cultural district with canonical museums in Abu Dhabi.²

The global economic downturn has played a pivotal role in the development of the UAE's cultural sphere. In the midst of an international financial crisis that has severely hampered the business and real estate segments of the country's new economy,³ the arts have continued to draw crowds and build a following; optimistic outlooks prevailed at the opening of the latest Sharjah Biennial and Art Dubai in the spring of 2009 as well as at auctions hosted by the Dubai branches of Christie's and Bonhams in October 2009. Some in the West appear eager to announce the downfall of the perceived excess embodied by the teeming wealth of the UAE. Will their dismal projections come to fruition or will the country endure and adapt to a fluctuating cultural climate? This paper follows reactions to the growth of international contemporary art markets and local contemporary art community-building in the UAE as it transitions from an era of prosperity to a period of realignment.

The focus of this paper will be on how these battles have played out in the media. A plethora of key players throughout the local, regional, and international art worlds are voicing their opinions on the value and viability of this rate of growth, a dialogue that has become increasingly urgent in the context of heightened international attention on the region following September 11th. Cultural figures throughout the Emirates regularly react and respond to the attitudes and accounts of Western journalists and critics, who have often been disparaging of this growth. As a researcher living outside the region, I have endeavored to sort through these diverse perspectives in an effort to explore how internal and external forces simultaneously clash and collaborate as they forge an emerging contemporary art community in the UAE.

The History and Scope of Growth

Dubai has been at the center of the worldwide attention directed toward the UAE. On a quest to be known as the "Paris of the Middle East," the emirate with the smallest supply of oil reserves has been the runaway leader in developing real estate, tourism, and financial industries.⁴ As Dubai began attracting foreign curiosity and investment, it drew the interest of the international art market. In May 2006, Christie's held the first auction of modern and contemporary art in the Middle East. The results shattered all expectations as the sale earned double the pre-auction estimates.⁵ Consisting mostly of work from the Middle East and South Asia, the auction established Dubai as a center for artistic activity. Bonhams soon followed Christie's lead and opened an office in Dubai in 2007. Galleries began cropping up throughout Dubai's neighborhoods (Illus. 2), from the former warehouse district of Al Quoz to the heritage area of Bastakiya in Bur Dubai, with establishments like The Third Line, B21 Progressive Gallery, and XVA/AVE Gallery promoting contemporary artists from Egypt to Iran and Palestine to India.⁶ Dubai inaugurated its annual art fair in March 2007, and the most recent incarnation of Art Dubai in March 2009 boasted 68 galleries, the satellite Al Bastakiya Art Fair, and a handsomely-funded Abraaj Capital Art Prize.⁷ In a few short years,

¹ "UAE's growth to remain buoyant on diversification," *Kuwait Times*, February 21, 2007, Business News section, http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=NzA4Mg==.

² The seven emirates are Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah, and Umm al-Qaiwain.

³ "Real estate and bank stocks in UAE hit by investor worries about fourth quarter earnings," *Gulf News*, January 14, 2009, Business/Markets section, <http://gulfnews.com/business/markets/real-estate-and-bank-stocks-in-uae-hit-by-investor-worries-about-fourth-quarter-earnings-1.45052>.

⁴ Maymanah Farhat, "United Arab Emirates," *ArtAsiaPacific*, Almanac 2009 262.

⁵ Antonia Carver, "Art Market: Frieze, Christie's and the Dubai effect," *Bidoun*, Winter 2007 27.

⁶ Murtaza Vali, "Dubai: Art Entrepot," *Art Review*, July/August 2007 82.

⁷ Lucian Harris, "Art Dubai and the Future of the Middle East Art Market," *Apollo*, March 2009 29-30.

the fair has become a key platform for art communities engaged with the MENASA (Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia) region. The Dubai Culture and Arts Authority (DCAA) has also teamed up with several museums in Germany to establish a group of universal museums in the planned district of Khor Dubai in the Jaddaf area.⁸

Cultural development in Sharjah began in the 1980s and 1990s,⁹ before the explosive expansion of the last ten years. The Sharjah Museums Department manages 18 museums, which range in focus from calligraphy to science to historic preservation, and the majority of which were founded in the late 1990s.¹⁰ The early push to make Sharjah a regional art hub was hampered by what has been described as "the mismanagement of institutions and funds."¹¹ Despite such setbacks, the emirate's cultural infrastructure has continued to solidify, particularly in relation to the internationally-heralded biennial that it has hosted since 1993. The 2009 edition pioneered a new approach to the organization of biennials by requesting proposals from contributing artists to be realized at the opening of the exhibition. Sharjah Biennial Director Jack Persekian, a curator from Jerusalem, did away with an overriding theme for the show and instead decided to highlight "process not product."¹² The Biennial consistently provides a space for artists who work both in the region and outside of it to be critical about issues like the pace of industrialization in the Gulf, and the treatment of foreign migrant workers who provide the labor for that growth, along with environmental consequences of construction and the alteration of the landscape.

In recent years, institutional development has been focused on Saadiyat Island, a \$27 billion project anchored on a man-made sandbar that juts into the sea off the northeast coast of Abu Dhabi (Illus. 3). Serving as the pillars for this cultural nucleus are the Middle East outposts of the Guggenheim and the Louvre, which are both slated to open in 2012. The Guggenheim endeavor is spearheaded by Thomas Krens, the former director of the full Guggenheim enterprise, and will be designed by architect Frank Gehry. Occupying 450,000 square feet of space, the Abu Dhabi location will be the Guggenheim's largest facility; while the allocation of the space is still being discussed, it has been decided that contemporary Middle Eastern art will have a dedicated section, alongside other exhibition spaces, a research center, and a conservation laboratory.¹³ The Louvre Abu Dhabi, announced in early 2007, six months after the Guggenheim plans were revealed, will be designed by architect Jean Nouvel. The building carries a price tag of \$525 million and the emirate will pay France an additional \$747 million for artwork and curatorial services.¹⁴ The Louvre Abu Dhabi will house and display a portion of collections from twelve different French museums along with works from its own collection, which it has been building slowly over the last eighteen months. An exhibition that opened at the Emirates Palace in Abu Dhabi to coincide with the groundbreaking of the Louvre Abu Dhabi in May 2009 featured nineteen of these acquisitions, including an ancient Greek ceramic figure and two Edouard Manet paintings, as well as loans from French museums, such as Chinese Buddhist statues and a wooden stool from Benin; this diversity of objects demonstrates the organizers' expressed interest in assembling and displaying artworks from a range of periods and civilizations.¹⁵ French citizens have been highly critical of this collaboration and other similar international

⁸ Germany signed a memorandum of understanding with the UAE in 2004, which outlined a long-term strategic partnership between the two nations in the realms of politics, culture, military, and economics. Mahmoud Habboush, "Speaker hails German goodwill towards UAE," *The National*, November 26, 2009, UAE section,

<http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20091127/NATIONAL/711269899/1010/rss>.

⁹ Maissa Alsuwaidi, e-mail message to author, April 27, 2009.

Alsuwaidi is the Operations Manager for the Sharjah Museums Department.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Farhat 261.

¹² Louisa Buck, "Sharjah Biennial: open invitation to artists leads to focused and evocative show," *The Art Newspaper*, April 2009, <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/article.asp?id=17102>.

¹³ Guggenheim, "Guggenheim Abu Dhabi Museum," <http://www.guggenheim.org/guggenheim-foundation/architecture/abu-dhabi>.

¹⁴ Sharon Waxman, "An Oasis in the Desert," *ARTnews*, February 2009 72-3.

¹⁵ Carol Vogel, "Abu Dhabi Gets a Sampler of World Art," *The New York Times*, May 27, 2009, Arts Section.

undertakings, including a recent partnership with the High Museum in Atlanta, and ridicule their government for selling off the country's artistic heritage.¹⁶

Other significant institutional projects scheduled for construction are a New York University campus, a performing arts center designed by British Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid, a maritime museum and the Sheikh Zayed National Museum. Rita Aoun-Abdo, an advisor to Abu Dhabi's Tourism Development Investment Company (TDIC), which oversees the Saadiyat Island initiative, classifies the cultural venture as "something new, experimental...It's a lab. People who come from the outside with prejudice need to forget all that and look again."¹⁷

Commentaries and Critiques

Aoun-Abdo's reference to "prejudgment" on the part of people "outside" reflects the myriad conflicting views of the UAE's cultural development that have bounced around throughout the globalizing art world in recent years. Her comment also points to animosities that have emerged from these conflicting perspectives. In researching the creative growth in the Emirates, I encountered three major strains of thought. The first came from the statements of UAE government representatives and foreign players affiliated with official ventures, which are overwhelmingly positive and optimistic about the progress and costs of rapid construction of institutions, venues, and markets for the arts. Conversely, the second perspective that surfaced was a cynical opinion that the dizzying growth in the UAE is manufactured, unsustainable, and will inevitably fail, often expressed by cultural players outside the region. The final view, which is somewhat hidden amongst the extremes of the first two, is more tempered and complex, representing the hopefulness of artists and arts professionals working in the region mediated with a bit of caution about the pitfalls of heedless investment in arts and culture.

The government of the UAE is the primary champion of cultural growth in the country, and its partners in international initiatives are eager to trumpet the potential of the development. The ambition and vision of the government is revealed in a statement made by Sheikh Sultan Bin Tahnoon Al Nahyan, a member of the Abu Dhabi royal family and the chair for the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage: "One of the essential goals for us is to create a cultural bridge. In 20 years Abu Dhabi will be a beacon of peace and culture, an oasis of culture and peace."¹⁸ This desire to serve as an exemplar for the Middle East and the larger Islamic world, while also endorsing a positive and benevolent image to the West, is echoed by Mubarak Al Muhairi, the managing director of TDIC, when he talks about cultivating the arts in order to increase tolerance within the societies.¹⁹ The noble light in which UAE officials view their projects also tints the proclamations of outsiders involved in the region. In response to the outcry of factions of the French citizenry over the Louvre's international endeavors, Henri Loyrette, the Louvre's director, speaks of the need for France to keep pace with the evolution of the art world landscape. In early 2007, he declared that the Louvre "cannot refuse to answer the questions posed by globalisation. All the world's museums, from the British Museum to the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, are moving beyond national borders. Our ambition is to invent our own model."²⁰ Loyrette's comments echo the idealistic notions promoted by Emirati cultural figures while reflecting his own commitment to innovating the boundaries of the world's oldest public museum.

In addition to grandiose announcements about the value of the mission in the UAE, project representatives and supporters also tend to gloss over some of the challenges facing the art community in the Emirates. One of these challenges is the lack of local artists, arts administrators and arts educators who contribute to the sustainability of other art centers throughout the world. John Martin, the director of Art Dubai, ignores the implications of this as he states matter-of-factly in a January 2007 interview with *Flash Art* magazine that "Dubai is unlikely to develop its own scene of resident artists," but rather will exist "as a

French President Nicolas Sarkozy attended the Louvre Abu Dhabi groundbreaking as well as the opening of the exhibition as part of a trip he took to the UAE capital, which also included the inauguration of a French military base there.

¹⁶ Alan Riding, "The Louvre's Art: Priceless. The Louvre's Name: Expensive," *The New York Times*, March 7, 2007, Arts Section.

¹⁷ Waxman 69 and 72.

¹⁸ Waxman 70.

¹⁹ Waxman 77.

²⁰ Adam Sage, "Purists villify Louvre over 'vulgar' plan to lease out masterpieces," *The Times*, January 8, 2007, Business Section, <http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/markets/europe/article1290513.ece>.

place that caters for a diverse group of collectors coming from throughout Asia."²¹ This casual dismissal of the importance of cultivating a local art public to support the international activity is indicative of the scarcity of interest or desire on the part of these foreign agents to encourage Emirati education and engagement surrounding contemporary art, which might diminish the current strength of international influence in the country's cultural sector and, conversely, the ability of the international community to financially profit from cultural growth in the region. However, in the last couple of years, Emiratis themselves have begun driving such efforts, which I explore in more detail later.

Other significant hurdles to the full flourishing of contemporary art in the UAE are the constraints imposed by its conservative political sphere. This obstacle came to the fore at Art Dubai 2008 when the Prime Minister of the UAE, Sheikh Mohammed al-Maktoum, and his son, Culture Minister Sheikh Majid al-Maktoum, asked that Pakistani artist Huma Mulji remove one of her sculptures from the exhibition space. The piece, titled *Arabian Delight*, is a taxidermy camel folded and stuffed into a large suitcase, referencing the Gulf's reputation for cruel treatment of foreign workers. The organizers of Art Dubai refused to comment on the incident, effectively stifling any debate about censorship and artistic freedom that might contradict the message of tolerance that they aim to promote.²²

On the reverse end of the spectrum are commentators who highlight the drawbacks of the UAE's burgeoning art scene. Some of these observers are inhabitants of the region, and their criticisms concentrate on the importation of Euroamerican culture as a basis for Emirati artistic growth, as well the negative aspects of such rapid economic development. University of Sharjah sociologist Hashim Sarhan questions the value and benefits of bringing the Louvre and the Guggenheim to the UAE when he contends, "Why should we [Emiratis] wear other people's clothes? We have to wear our own clothes. If we wear other people's clothes, we will not feel comfortable."²³ Emirati artist Reem Al Ghaith, who was the youngest artist featured in the 2009 Sharjah Biennial, creates multi-media sculptures of Dubai landscapes and construction scenes that reference the perilous labor and environmental conditions at building sites throughout the country.²⁴ Al Ghaith explains that her work reveals the obscured "labourers who you never really see" along with the demolition and development that "just keeps eating the land."²⁵ Sarhan and Al Ghaith's testimonials reference local reservations and concerns regarding the evolving cultural, social, and environmental climates.

Most pessimistic assessments, however, tend to appear in American and European art publications, which often predict the eventual stagnation and failure of the UAE's cultural endeavors. They take the form of bleak oversimplifications, like the judgment expressed by Matthew Collings in a June 2008 *Modern Painters* article that claimed the UAE is "devoted to money...No one really pretends that life is about anything else."²⁶ Other analysts prefer to make dismal, trite projections such as the one made by Valentina Sansone of *Flash Art* when she mused in mid-2008 that given the lack of arts infrastructure in the UAE, "we can only wonder if it won't remain just an oasis in the sand."²⁷ Sansone's choice to set up the opposition of "we" and "it" establishes a separation between the *Flash Art* reader and the Emirati community and, furthermore, seems to challenge the UAE to prove its viability to the rest of the art world. The most scathing account of the development in the Gulf that I encountered in my study manifested itself as outright disdainful mockery, courtesy of Judith Benhamou-Huet writing for the French *Art Press* magazine in January 2008. She opens her piece with the announcement that, "Today in Abu Dhabi, capital of the United Arab Emirates, there is nothing. Nothing for a lover of art and culture, that is. Just a recreation of a Bedouin village where you can buy slippers made in China and stale Iranian saffron."²⁸ The author's portrayal of Abu Dhabi as a tacky tourist trap belittles and dismisses the scope and nuances of the

²¹ Aaron Moulton, "Questions to the Co-Director of the Gulf Art Fair," *Flash Art*, January/February 2007 57.

²² The Editors, "Art Fair Report: A Caravan of White Cubes," *ArtAsiaPacific*, May/June 2008 94.

²³ Waxman 74.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch has published multiple reports in the last several years documenting rampant abuse of the immigrant workforce in the UAE on the part of Emirati employers.

HG Masters, "Labor Abuses Reported on Museum Island," *ArtAsiaPacific*, June/August 2009 35.

²⁵ Robert Bound, "Just So Hot Right Now," *Monocle*, May 2009.

²⁶ Matthew Collings, "Doo Buy! Giddy asinine wealthy fun in the United Arab Emirates," *Modern Painters*, June 2008 38.

²⁷ Valentina Sansone, "1000 and 1 Art Dubai," *Flash Art*, May/June 2008 83.

²⁸ Judith Benhamou-Huet, "The Emirates Art Bonanza," *Art Press*, January 2008 16.

cultural development of the area. This sarcastic tone continues throughout the article, as she precisely refers to "episode[s] of the ongoing 'Middle East Art Bonanza.'"²⁹ The shallow, one-dimensional representation of the Emirates that these commentators propagate reinforces through contrast the depth and richness of the European and American art capitals in which they have been raised and educated. For these players to admit that there are real opportunities for artistic innovation offered by the developing infrastructures in the UAE would be to strike a blow at existing art world hierarchies. Therefore, perhaps in order to reassure themselves of their own relevance, they deride the aspirations of the UAE and denounce them as superficial and transitory spectacles. However, the resistance that these commentators display toward the consideration of the UAE as a serious art center obscures the complexity of the region's potentials and pitfalls.

Critics that do shed light on the various layers of the country's cultural initiatives are overshadowed by the extreme perspectives of the two cohorts discussed above, making their analyses particularly valuable. Those with a more balanced approach tend to be scholars or residents of the Middle East who are familiar with the cultural and social dynamics at work, but who also do not have a direct stake in the success of the UAE's ventures. This affords them the space to be relatively critical and objective. Murtaza Vali, an art historian and writer concerned with the region, draws attention to the hypocrisy inherent in some criticisms of Abu Dhabi's collaborations with international museums as he reviews the Sharjah Biennial of 2007, titled *Still Life: Art, Ecology, and the Politics of Change*. He states that such projects have "ruffled feathers as far away as France (the French, of course, know absolutely nothing about building a tourist economy around art and culture)."

The biting sarcasm that Vali adopts is his response to what he calls the "condescending Western media," typified by essays like that of Benhamou-Huet, mentioned above.³⁰ However, Vali is also comprehensive in his analysis as he takes issue with the legitimacy of local efforts as well as distant interpretations. He questions the validity of the Biennial's decision to make "ecology" a focal point of the exhibition, given the UAE's history as an oil-based economy and its brazen manipulation of the physical landscape for the purpose of industrialization and development.³¹

This well-rounded approach to criticism is also evident in an article by Negar Azimi, an editor at the Middle Eastern-focused magazine *Bidoun*, which appeared in the April 2008 issue of *Artforum*. Like Vali, Azimi highlights the biased double standard that emerges from some Western assessments of development in the Emirates, as she interrogates the validity of Emirati claims about encouraging a commitment to fostering art education among local audiences. In addition to her thorough and substantive analysis, the author also calls attention to the broader implications of the current historical moment in the Middle East. Azimi notes that while there are risks involved in the rapid growth in cultural infrastructure, the possibilities of such expansion are something to nurture. "It stands to pioneer a new sort of cosmopolitanism," she asserts, "linking the cultural capitals of Cairo and Beirut—to each other and to the rest of the world—and to reinvigorate a region that has been subject to one too many narratives of failure."³² The threat of failure is one that continues to loom over the region, particularly as the worldwide economic downturn endangers investment, travel, and construction.

From Prosperity to Realignment

The global recession has hampered growth in the economy of the UAE, most significantly in Dubai. Jobs have been slashed, real estate prices have dropped, and credit is difficult to obtain. In February 2009, Dubai's wealthier neighbor, Abu Dhabi, purchased ten billion dollars in bonds from the struggling, debt-riddled emirate.³³ In November 2009, the state-owned investment firm Dubai World announced that it would not be able to make payments on its debt for the next six months, sparking worries throughout the

²⁹ Judith Benhamou-Huet 16.

³⁰ Murtaza Vali, "Sharjah Biennial 8: 'Still Life: Art, Ecology, and the Politics of Change.'" *Bidoun*, Summer 2007 103.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Negar Azimi, "Trading Places," *Artforum*, April 2008 394.

³³ "The Outstretched Palm," *Economist*, February 26, 2009, Finance and Economics Section, http://www.economist.com/finance/displaystory.cfm?story_id=13186145.

international financial markets.³⁴ Headlines appearing in publications like *The New York Times*, the *Economist*, and *The Wall Street Journal* give readers the impression that Dubai is on the verge of complete financial ruin, with references to downward spirals, bursting bubbles, and soaring burdens. A *Middle East Times* editorial by a South Asian expatriate living in Dubai rails against the recent "feeding frenzy amongst the pundits and chattering classes who have prophesied all these years Dubai would not last long."³⁵ The war of words that unfolded between cohorts of commentators during the UAE's quick ascent has continued during the current period of stasis and slowdown.

As a result, for an arts writer living outside the region, it has been a challenge to sort through the jumbled opinions on the health and direction of the cultural sector. Reporting in March 2009 from the synchronized openings of Art Dubai and the ninth Sharjah Biennial, *Artforum* portrayed the overall mood of both events as melancholic, with figures such as Thomas Krens and architect Rem Koolhaas (who is designing a 1.5 billion-square foot Waterfront City in Dubai) trumpeting the region's vitality while many spectators voiced their skepticism about its longevity.³⁶ Local Emirati newspapers are predominantly positive, vaguely boasting about unprecedented crowds and enormous successes. During a February 2009 conference in Berlin about the progress of the UAE's cultural development projects, disparate reports were given: Michael Schindhelm, the cultural director of DCAA, announced that the Middle East Center for Modern Art and a theater complex have been stalled while Zaki Anwar Nusseibeh, one of Abu Dhabi's premier cultural representatives, insisted that the construction on Saadiyat Island would continue unimpaired.³⁷

The perspectives of individuals living and working in the Gulf's art world with whom I spoke also gave me a variety of impressions about UAE happenings. Maissa Alsuwaidi, the Operations Manager for the Sharjah Museums Department, informed me that she has observed a decrease in commercial gallery activity, but that the recession has motivated Sharjah institutions to expand the content and scope of their programming, evidenced in the Sharjah Biennial by the expansion of the film and performance programs.³⁸ Sharing a different take on the commercial gallery sphere, artist William Andersen, an American living in Kuwait, noted that he has witnessed steady sales and a strong interest in representing emerging artists at galleries in the area, including at the Opera Gallery in Dubai where his work was featured in a group show during the summer of 2009. However, a gallery owner in the region stated that he felt things had come to a "standstill" and that the community is rather "pessimistic."³⁹ Clearly, the global economic slowdown is not having a universally negative impact on the UAE, but it certainly is a ubiquitous financial and psychological presence in the minds and daily lives of many, as it is throughout the rest of the world.

Dubai seems to be in a much more precarious position economically when compared with its fellow emirates. Abu Dhabi has greater oil reserves and more money while Sharjah has stretched its development out over the course of several decades, as opposed to condensing it into several years. However, in the midst of the anxiety about the fate of Dubai, it is reassuring that the art market, though contracted, remains lively. Art Dubai 2009 welcomed 14,000 attendees,⁴⁰ up from 12,000 in 2008,⁴¹ and while sales figures varied between exhibitors, editors from *ArtAsiaPacific* noted the overall energy of the crowd was optimistic.⁴² Dealers' heavier focus on artists from the Gulf and the Middle East, as opposed to

³⁴ Chip Cummins, Dana Cimilluca, and Sara Schaefer Munoz, "Dubai's Woes Shake UAE, Region," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 26, 2009, Business section, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703499404574559452437253122.html>.

³⁵ Aijaz Zaka Syed, "View from Dubai: Don't Write Us Off Just Yet," *Middle East Times*, February 26, 2009, Politics Section, http://www.metimes.com/Politics/2009/02/26/view_from_dubai_dont_write_us_off_just_yet/7385/.

³⁶ David Velasco, "The Gulf Between," *Artforum*, March 27, 2009, Scene and Herd Section, <http://artforum.com/new.php?pn=diary&id=22372>.

³⁷ Henrik Thomsen, "In den Sand gesetzt," *Die Tageszeitung*, February 4, 2009, Art section, <http://www.taz.de/1/leben/kuenste/artikel/1/finanzkrise-beeintraechtigt-kunstplaene/>.

³⁸ Maissa Alsuwaidi, e-mail message to author, April 27, 2009.

³⁹ William Andersen, e-mail messages to author, April 18, 2009 and November 7, 2009.

⁴⁰ Artdaily.org, "Art Dubai Announces Dates for Its 2010 Contemporary Art Fair," http://www.artdaily.org/index.asp?int_sec=11&int_new=34205.

⁴¹ Salwat Ali, "Art Dubai 2008," *Architecture Design Art*, July 2008, Art section, <http://www.adapk.com/art-dubai-2008/>.

⁴² The Editors, "Art Fair Report: Old World Exodus," *ArtAsiaPacific*, May/June 2009 66.

those from the West or the Indian Subcontinent, signaled a desire to invest in and fortify local art communities. This trend was also echoed in the October 2009 Christie's auction in Dubai of International Modern and Contemporary Art, which saw approximately three-quarters of its lots sold for a total of \$6.7 million. This sum represents a 50 percent increase from the April 2009 sale, demonstrating a modest but healthy rebound. The sale was solidly centered on work from the Middle East, and it set records for Arab, Turkish, and Iranian artists. Michael Jeha, the Managing Director of Christie's Middle East, declared the event reveals that "despite the global economic troubles of the last year, the appetite for art in the Middle East continues to grow, as does the international appreciation for Middle Eastern art."⁴³ While the initial phases of cultural development in the UAE have, thus far, made attracting international acclaim and audiences the priority, it appears that economic uncertainty has redirected many efforts toward engaging the local publics and supporting regional artists.

Fostering Local Communities

Examples of these efforts have taken a variety of forms and have been promoted by a range of arts administrators and organizations. Many of these endeavors have unfolded over the last year, but two important projects pioneered by Emiratis themselves were formulated a couple of years earlier, breaking important ground for these later ventures. The Flying House in Dubai, an exhibition space and archive, was opened in January 2008 by businessman Abdul Raheem Sharif, who wanted to establish a venue where he could display the vast collection of work by his two artist brothers that he had been storing away for decades. Today, The Flying House promotes and showcases the work of Hassan and Hussein Sharif, two of the UAE's most esteemed artists, alongside other artists living and working in the Emirates.⁴⁴ Also looking to make her own opportunities is Emirati artist Lateefa bint Maktoum, who developed a gallery and studio program called Tashkeel with the help of her former teacher, which also opened in Dubai in January 2008. After graduating from art school in the UAE, Maktoum observed that many artists "had fantastic concepts but [they] didn't know how to execute them. So we created a situation where people could learn from each other. We intended for it to grow organically rather than in a planned fashion."⁴⁵ Grass-roots and artist-run initiatives such as these laid the foundation for the community-building projects that have developed since the global financial crisis.

In early 2009, the Emirates Palace in Abu Dhabi hosted an exhibition curated by Anne Baldassari of the Musée National Picasso in Paris titled *Emirati Expressions*, which featured over 150 works by 87 local artists. TDIC initiated the project and received close to 500 submissions, eliminating the group's early worries that it might not attract enough interested artists to fill the space.⁴⁶ While some commentators chose to ignore the importance of the show by dismissing the entire body of work, with headlines like "Derivative at Best" announced by a critic posting on Artslant.com, many art writers and critics living in the region recognized and applauded the ambitious undertaking.⁴⁷ *Emirati Expressions* presented the art of emerging as well as veteran artists from the country, encouraging both participant and audience to consider the visual arts a viable career path. Aiming to foster a community among these arts practitioners is the Portfolio Gallery, which opened in Dubai's Al Quoz district in September 2009. In addition to hosting exhibitions of photography by artists working in the region, Portfolio also houses a communal space where artists can meet, share a cup of tea, and discuss art.⁴⁸ This focus on cultivating connections and collaborations between UAE residents is a very new direction for Emiratis, but it is creating a lot of opportunity and excitement within the country.

⁴³ Artdaily.org, "Christie's Auction of International Modern and Contemporary Art Realizes \$6.7 Million," http://www.artdaily.com/index.asp?int_sec=2&int_new=341781.

⁴⁴ Gerhard Haupt and Pat Binder, "The Flying House," *Nafas art magazine*, April 2008, http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2008/the_flying_house.

⁴⁵ chinar tree, "We want to cultivate art from Dubai.' An Interview with Lateefa bint Maktoum at Tashkeel," December 2008, <http://chinartree.com/2009/01/08/we-want-to-cultivate-art-from-dubai-an-interview-with-lateefa-bint-maktoum-december-2008/>.

⁴⁶ Gareth Clark, "Emirati Expression," *Time Out Abu Dhabi*, February 1, 2009, Art section, <http://www.timeoutabudhabi.com/art/features/6085-emirati-expressions>.

⁴⁷ Valerie Grove, "Emirati Expressions," FlashArtonline.com, Review section, http://www.flashartonline.com/interno.php?pagina=newyork_det&id_art=281&det=ok&title=Emirati-Expressions.

⁴⁸ Canvas Guide, "Impressive Portfolio," <http://www.canvasonline.com/images/pdf/ddelights.pdf>.

Two other significant endeavors have adopted a more international scope while continuing to prioritize the local arts community. The UAE had its first entry at the Venice Biennale in 2009, with a pavilion curated by Tirdad Zolghadr, a native Iranian currently based in Berlin, who previously co-curated the 2005 Sharjah Biennial.⁴⁹ At the center of the Biennale's Arsenale, the space presented a solo show of Dubai-based photographer and filmmaker Lamyia Gargash, as well as the work of several other Emirati artists, videos of conversations between some of the UAE's prominent cultural figures, and architectural models of several Saadiyat Island projects. The pavilion's commissioner, Dr. Lamees Hamdan, expressed in an interview soon after the event's opening that she feels "the Venice Biennale speaks very much to UAE artists themselves...who are very underrepresented...in everything." Furthermore, she hopes that "the pavilion will not only speak to an international audience, but also to commercial galleries back home, that there are some talented individuals that you guys are not representing."⁵⁰ The first annual Abu Dhabi Art fair that took place in November 2009 concentrated on doing just that, by featuring a strong contingent of MENASA artists and galleries. Formulated after artparis-AbuDhabi 2009 was cancelled due to financial woes, Abu Dhabi Art included a greater number of regional galleries than artparis-AbuDhabi had in previous years, along with hosting an extensive range of performances, lectures, book launches, and exhibitions relating to the promotion of the contemporary arts communities in the Gulf and neighboring areas.

Initiatives related to issues of education and funding are also helping to nurture these communities. The governments of the UAE are increasingly investing in arts education at institutions such as Zayed University in Abu Dhabi as well as the planned New York University outpost in the same emirate.⁵¹ Others are looking to begin cultivating contemporary art discourse within the artistic community. A group called Thinking Cloud organizes workshops in Al Quoz as well as at museums in Sharjah surrounding topics of cultural identity and pedagogy.⁵² British Co-founder Laura Trelford explains that Thinking Cloud fills a need "to further analyse and discuss the new trend of contemporary art, bringing together practitioners, critics, gallery owners, art students and a general art interested public to debate pertinent issues."⁵³ Still other parties are dedicating themselves to ensuring that regional artists have the financial support they need to continue their practices and pursuits. The Dubai-based investment firm Abraaj Capital inaugurated its Abraaj Capital Art Prize at Art Dubai in 2009 and it plans to annually award its sizeable \$200,000 gifts to teams made up of one artist and one curator. Only artists living and working in the MENASA area are eligible as Abraaj's mission is to "raise awareness of innovative and experimental work being created by artists" in that part of the world.⁵⁴ Trelford, who is also the Abraaj Capital Art Prize Manager for Art Dubai, emphasizes that many of these young initiatives "place education and documenting artistic practice and development at the core of their work—producing books, videos, and archival material annually."⁵⁵ This growing concentration on fostering an educated, critical, and well-equipped art community within the UAE is a very welcome shift for those inside the country, as well as for proponents of its cultural expansion outside the country who have been yearning for government and institutions to encourage the grassroots development necessary for a strong foundation in the arts.

Clash and Collaboration

The interaction of influences within the United Arab Emirates' evolving cultural landscape raises important issues surrounding the potentials and pitfalls of various arts infrastructure models in an emerging art market and community. The international art world figures and institutions recruited by the Emirati government during the initial years of the country's cultural development bypassed and dismissed efforts to cultivate a local art public. In response to this neglect, and in the wake of a financial crisis that prompted the questioning of the reliability and longevity of foreign investment in the UAE, Emirati artists and officials launched their own initiatives related to opportunities and education for the native and resident population. This progression can be read as a clash between global versus local, external versus internal, or

⁴⁹ Clint Burnham, "Report: Judgement and Contemporary Art Criticism," *Canadian Art*, March 12, 2009, Features section, <http://www.canadianart.ca/online/features/2009/03/12/judgment-and-contemporary-art/>.

⁵⁰ Al Manakh, "Interview with Lamees Hamdan Gergash," June 25, 2009, <http://almanakh.org/?p=574>.

⁵¹ Sara Raza, "The United Arab Emirates' Grand Designs," *ArtAsiaPacific*, March/April 2009 64-5.

⁵² Ibid 65.

⁵³ Laura Trelford, e-mail message to author, November 8, 2009.

⁵⁴ Art Dubai, "Abraaj Capital Art Prize," <http://www.artdubai.ae/>.

⁵⁵ Laura Trelford, e-mail message to author, November 8, 2009.

foreign versus native; however, these forces are not entirely distinct, as demonstrated by the contributions of arts administrators such as Tirdad Zolghadr and Laura Trelford, who have channeled their backgrounds and experience into working with artists living in the UAE.

An examination of the cultural landscape in the Emirates reveals that it is certainly not advantageous for a burgeoning art center to rely solely upon global art models as vehicles for growth. In addition, I feel that this case simultaneously demonstrates that it is just as counterproductive to focus on creating purely local models. The UAE's culture and society are inextricably entwined with the rest of the world, as people, ideas, and economies have become increasingly tangled, for better or worse, particularly since September 11th. Therefore, I prefer to emphasize the possibility of collaboration between these distant and near influences and infrastructures, as the contemporary art community in the UAE shifts away from its dependence on a runaway art market. As curator Zolghadr declares, "the crisis might actually be good. There's currently a lot of local support for more sustainable, smaller-scale projects that don't reap immediate rewards... We need to think in the long term and not only go after artists who raise a ruckus on the art market."⁵⁶ It remains to be seen how accessible and successful the UAE's educational and community-building initiatives will be, but it is a promising sign that the country is increasingly looking to the talent and tenacity of its residents and neighbors to enhance the efforts of international agents as they guide it through tough economic times and into the future.

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⁵⁶ Lyra Kilston, "UAE Pavilion," *Modern Painters*, May 2009 59.

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Building The Devi Art Foundation and the Kolkata Museum of Modern Art:
Global Art and Museums in the New Urban India
By Grace Murray

A major art museum building boom has taken place around the world in the last decade, with the creation of new cultural institutions accompanying the rapid economic growth of many countries, particularly in Asia and the Middle East. In India, private collectors and philanthropists are striving to build “world-class” art museums to match their ambitions in the realms of business and politics. These museums can be seen as a result of the exponential growth of the country’s art market since the late 1990s, the rise of a powerful group of private collectors, and the continuing failure of older government-run museums to engage with contemporary art. In this paper, I will focus on two new art museums that I believe represent important emerging trends: the Devi Art Foundation, which opened in New Delhi in 2008, and the Kolkata Museum of Modern Art, scheduled to open in 2013. These organizations have very different organizing rationales; the Devi Foundation is a small, collector-driven contemporary art museum, while KMOMA is an ambitious public-private partnership that aims to exhibit Indian modern and contemporary art with international art. However, both of these examples represent the desire of private collectors and civic leaders to appropriate and reconfigure Western art museum models.

Although Indian contemporary art has been shown in museums, art fairs, and biennials around the world since the late 1990s, until recently few museums in India were showing this work. The country’s government-run museums suffer from insufficient financial resources and restrictive bureaucratic regulations. For example, the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi has avoided hiring experimental curators or showing new media art, and collects only paintings, sculptures, prints and photographs.¹ Although paintings by celebrated living artists such as Vivan Sundaram, Jitish Kallat, Nalini Malani, and Subodh Gupta are on display, government regulations prohibit the museum from acquiring video art and installations by the same artists due to their supposedly more ephemeral nature.² This means that although strong in Indian modern art, the NGMA collection is not truly representative of art production over the last fifteen years. The extensive bureaucracy, poor facilities, and conservative curatorial choices of government-run museums such as the NGMA are some of the reasons that private collectors and philanthropists have begun creating new museums. Unlike the older colonial and national museums, new institutions such as the Devi Art Foundation and KMOMA are concerned with connecting to international contemporary art networks through the kind of art they collect, their architecture, and their urban locations in new satellite cities.

Perhaps the best-known example of a private art museum in India today is the Devi Art Foundation. Founded by the mother and son pair of collectors Lekha and Anupam Poddar in August 2008, it is considered one of India’s first non-commercial contemporary art spaces³. The foundation’s galleries are located in Gurgaon, a satellite city located south of New Delhi, and the collection includes the work of prominent Indian contemporary artists such as Subodh Gupta, Bharti Kher, Sudarshan Shetty, and Raqs Media Collective, as well as folk and tribal artworks. Although the Poddar collection initially consisted of only works by Indian artists, it has expanded to include artists from other countries in South and West Asia. Anupam Poddar has described the foundation as “a platform for the convergence of cutting-edge, experimental art in the sub-continent and...such works from greater Asia,” and his ambitious agenda includes building an ever-growing collection, encouraging public awareness of contemporary art, and eventually moving into a larger building in the next several years.⁴ At the moment, the lack of infrastructure in the Indian art world provides opportunities for individual collectors with a vision like the Poddars to make a major impact on the scene.

Although only in his mid-30s, Anupam Poddar has been a serious art collector for nearly fifteen

¹ “Something is Rotten at NGMA,” *Art Concerns*, March 2007, <http://www.artconcerns.net/2007March15/html/coverstory.htm>.

² Kavita Singh (Professor, School of Art and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi), personal interview, January 2010.

³ Somini Sengupta, “Where Tradition Has Ruled, a Home for Contemporary Art,” *The New York Times*, August 26, 2008.

⁴ Annette Ekin, “Devi Art Foundation,” *The India Tube*, <http://www.theindiatube.com/component/content/article/43-features/172-by%20Annette%20Ekin.html>.

years.⁵ His often flamboyant taste is reflected in the interior he has created in his family's home in which every room, bathrooms included, is filled with art.⁶ The Poddar family, originally from Rajasthan, made its fortune in the paper industry and also owns a chain of luxury resorts. Poddar grew up surrounded by his mother's collection of folk art, but began collecting himself in his twenties. The first works he acquired—including Subodh Gupta's life-size pink fiberglass cow *Rani* and Bharti Kher's sperm-shaped bindi sculpture *Spit and Swallow*—were inspired by what he saw as “a new version of India that this generation—my generation—was grappling with.”⁷ Gupta's *Rani*, which fuses the most recognizable symbol of traditional Indian culture, the holy cow, with a distinct pop sensibility, has become an icon of the Poddar collection.

Although the Devi Art Foundation is a non-profit museum open to the public, it has no board of trustees or permanent curators. Anupam Poddar makes acquisition decisions with the help of a small rotating team of young curators and assistants, and guest curators are invited to create exhibitions drawn from the collection, which are on view for about six months.⁸ The first exhibitions organized were *Still Moving Image*, the inaugural show which featured photography, film, and video; *Where in the World*, which explored and questioned the relationship of contemporary Indian artists with the international art world, and *Resemble/Reassemble*, a survey of contemporary art from Pakistan. The foundation is also exploring different ways to combine folk and tribal art with contemporary art, and is currently commissioning work from artists who use traditional techniques to deal with contemporary issues for an upcoming exhibition.⁹

The Devi Art Foundation's architecture is representative of Anupam Poddar's negotiation between “international” and “Indian” themes in his art collecting. Designed by Indian architect and landscape designer Aniket Bhagwat, the building's imposing façade has been described by one journalist as “a giant portal of rusted steel, thrusting skyward like a cross between a Richard Serra sculpture and the monumental iwan of a Mughal mosque,” and like a Serra sculpture, the corten steel on the building's exterior will rust over time¹⁰. To visit the museum, located in the same building as the corporate offices of the Poddar family company, Sirpur Paper Mills, Ltd, one must enter through a large metal gate guarded by several security guards, and no signs immediately indicate that it is a museum open to the public rather than a private office building. Inside there are two three-story buildings facing each other across an open central courtyard, shaded by rows of freestanding brick pillars angled outwards to create a rippling sense of movement. The interior walls of the courtyard are made from locally handcrafted bricks in fifteen different shapes and colors that cast shadows, turning the court into a lively and intriguing space¹¹.

Inside, there are three gallery spaces with poured cement floors, high ceilings, and exposed beams, giving the space the feeling of a post-industrial warehouse despite the fact that it is a brand new construction. Most of the rooms have no windows, purposely darkening the space to aid in viewing video installations. The reception desk doubles as the bookstore/gift shop, and there is a ground floor museum café facing the outdoor courtyard. The Devi Foundation's sleek gallery spaces and installations of new media art imply that it is more closely linked to the international contemporary art world than other museums in New Delhi, and in fact Anupam Poddar has said that he modeled the space on others he had seen around the world.¹² Although the building feels modern because of its materials and its simplicity, it

⁵ Judith Benhamou-Huet, “Taking it All In,” *Art Info*, September 1, 2008, <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/28380/taking-it-all-in/>.

⁶ Lucian Harris, “India's first private museum of contemporary art” *The Art Newspaper*, March 11, 2008.

⁷ Shruti Ravindran, “My Own Little Louvre” *Outlook India*, November 23, 2009, <http://outlookindia.com/article.aspx?262798>.

⁸ Amit Kumar Jain (Head of Programs, Devi Art Foundation, Gurgaon), personal interview, January 2010.

⁹ Jain, interview.

¹⁰ Lucian Harris, “India's first private museum of contemporary art” *The Art Newspaper*, March 11, 2008.

¹¹ Dua, “On Firm Foundations.”

¹² Jain, interview. Poddar also keeps track of current museum exhibition practices through his cousin Sandhini Poddar, a curator at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

also references traditional Indian architecture through elements such as textured wall surfaces and the enclosed courtyard.

The Devi Art Foundation is emblematic of the collision of the new and the old occurring in rapidly expanding satellite towns like Gurgaon. The art historian Shukla Sawant described the museum's location as a "surreal mix of time zones" in the catalogue for the exhibition *Where in the World*: "As the rural rubs shoulders with the urban, cows slumber on the pavements outside high-gloss skyscrapers as 'neutral'-accented English-speakers of the call center industry walk past migrant labor from the interiors of India"¹³. The Devi Foundation's exhibitions aim to appeal to the newly wealthy residents of Gurgaon, intriguing them with the possibility of an international lifestyle centered on art collecting.¹⁴ Nevertheless, with a current attendance rate of only 8-10 visitors per day, the museum still has a long way to go to increase public awareness of its programs.¹⁵ In July 2010 a new Delhi Metro station will open nearby, which will surely affect the museum's level of visibility. Poddar plans eventually to move into a much larger space with a library, an auditorium, and storage and conservation areas: "maybe in a year, maybe in two years, five years, it will be like the new Tate, the new Guggenheim, the new Art Institute of Chicago."¹⁶

Although the Devi Art Foundation is still relatively new, the provocative nature of its collection and exhibitions are signs of its emergence as a new kind of art space in Delhi, distinct from government-run museums in its embrace of experimental contemporary art. However, thus far the museum has focused on fairly traditional modes of exhibition, and has not yet ventured into the realms of performance, public art, artist residencies, or other kinds of dynamic programming that would truly explore what the role of a contemporary art museum can be and forge a stronger connection with the art community in Delhi and internationally. The museum represents the vision of a single family, and it is located in a relatively small space with a very small staff. How it will manage to professionalize its operations, exhibit folk art alongside contemporary art, care for its ever-increasing collection, and reach a wider public in the years to come is yet to be determined.

Kolkata Museum of Modern Art

An ambitious project currently being planned in the Indian state of West Bengal, the Kolkata Museum of Modern Art (KMOMA) is still in the development phase but is scheduled to open by 2013. Unlike the Devi Foundation and other new private museums, KMOMA is being created by a public-private partnership that includes the national, state, and city governments, the Centre for International Modern Art (a commercial art gallery in Kolkata), and a group of corporate sponsors.¹⁷ The Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, renowned for projects including the Beijing Bird's Nest Olympic Stadium and London's Tate Modern, were selected in 2008 to design the \$130 million museum in the satellite city of New Town. This project is significant because it aims to create a flagship modern art museum to restore Kolkata's heritage as a cultural center and "rebrand" it as a global city. Because it does not yet exist physically but only through proposals, models, and a website, any understanding of KMOMA will be fragmentary, but it provides a fascinating opportunity to speculate on how new institutions may affect the Indian art world in the near future.

The capital of the British Raj until 1911, Kolkata has been a site for the blending of Indian and European culture for centuries. In the early twentieth century the city was the home of the Bengal School led by Abanindranath Tagore as well as later modernist movements that attempted to fuse Indian artistic traditions with Western avant-garde styles.¹⁸ But the move of the colonial capital to New Delhi in 1911 created a power vacuum in the city, and after independence and partition in 1947 and again during

¹³ Shukla Sawant, "Material Means," in *Where in the World* exh. cat. (New Delhi: Devi Art Foundation, 2008) 19.

¹⁴ Hans Belting, "Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate," in *The Global Art World*, ed. Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 67.

¹⁵ Jain, interview.

¹⁶ Jain, interview.

¹⁷ "Sotheby's Sale for Museum," in *The Telegraph Kolkata*, 16 July 2007, http://www.telegraphindia.com/1070716/asp/calcutta/story_8049998.asp

¹⁸ Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-Garde 1922-1947* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007) 10.

Bangladesh's fight for independence in 1971, it became the destination of hundreds of thousands of refugees. The activities of Mother Theresa and other charities have only reinforced the image of Kolkata's poverty to the world. However, since 2000 Kolkata has experienced a modest amount of economic growth and is occupying a more central place in the global economy with the rising importance of its IT and communications industries.

As critic Geeta Kapur has pointed out, Kolkata has struggled because "as a city it has been unable to make the move from provincial modern to international modern to global contemporary, in the arts and in culture in general."¹⁹ Although it is the capital of West Bengal and is trying to position itself as a commercial center, it lacks major art institutions. Due to this perceived deficiency, government, business, and cultural leaders created the KMOMA trust in 2003. Their goal is to "build a museum of international standards" to house "a national and global collection of fine arts from the late 18th to the 21st century."²⁰ The KMOMA complex will be expansive, spread across a ten-acre site east of Kolkata in New Town, a rapidly developing satellite city like Gurgaon in Delhi, filled with information technology companies, malls, and new residential developments.²¹ With the creation of a new highway near the museum, it will be only a 10-minute drive to Kolkata's main international airport, and a new metro line is planned to connect the center of the city, New Town, and the airport.²² In theory, this would make it easy for someone from South Kolkata, Delhi, or New York to visit.²³

KMOMA will include nine floors and four wings for exhibitions, academic programs, art conservation, and research. The exhibition wing will include a national gallery of Indian art, as well as European, Middle Eastern, and East Asian collections, as well as temporary exhibitions of international contemporary art.²⁴ This broad scope suggests a desire to replicate so-called universal museums like the British Museum or the Art Institute of Chicago, which display art from all over the world; but according to Das, KMOMA will be something "beyond a universal museum," sharing information and art works and collaborating with other museums in Asia and beyond. In Das' words, a universal museum gathers everything into one point, but at KMOMA "everything will diverge outward."²⁵ The plan has additional components beyond the galleries; half of the site will be designated a "cultural city," which will include spaces for the visual and performing arts and cinema.²⁶ There will be an outdoor amphitheater sunken into the ground, which will provide a space for events such as performances and festivals modeled after the traditional performance spaces for *Jatra*, a form of popular folk theater.²⁷ The complex will also include retail areas selling Bengali craft items, as well as restaurants serving traditional food.²⁸ Thus the museums' activities will spread beyond the building and will attempt to market the uniqueness of Bengali culture, as well as showcase international artistic trends.

A central component of this plan is the innovative nature of the museum architecture. After

¹⁹ Geeta Kapur, "Where to Look When There Is No Modern Museum in Sight" (paper presented at the conference "Fair Trade: The Institution of Art in the New Economy," the annual meeting of the International Council of Museums Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art, Mexico City, Mexico, November 2009), http://www.cimam.org/meeting/meeting21.php?id_reunion=9.

²⁰ "About KMOMA" and "Vision," Kolkata Museum of Modern Art, <http://kmomamuseum.org/>.

²¹ Anthony King, "Speaking from the Margins: Postmodernism, Transnationalism, and the Imagining of Contemporary Indian Urbanity," in *Globalization and the Margins*, Richard Grant, ed. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 78.

²² "New Lease of Life to Rajarhat Real Estate" *The Statesman Kolkata*, 24 December 2009.

²³ Sougata Das (Art Historian at the Kolkata Museum of Modern Art), personal interview, Kolkata, December 2009.

²⁴ Gareth Harris, "Herzog & de Meuron to design new museum of modern art in Calcutta," *The Art Newspaper* (June 2008).

²⁵ Das, interview.

²⁶ Dua, "A Wider Canvas."

²⁷ Dua, "A Wider Canvas."

²⁸ "Auction for 500-cr Art Museum," *The Telegraph Kolkata*, 28 August 2006, http://www.telegraphindia.com/1060828/asp/calcutta/story_6664778.asp.

Herzog and de Meuron were chosen to design the building, one Indian journalist pointed out: “If your intention is to create something to rival Tate Modern, the most popular museum in Europe, what makes simple, stunning sense is to hire the same team of architects.”²⁹ Despite the fact that the museum is located in a new suburban development and not in the historic city center, the architects have repeatedly expressed their desire to make it as “Kolkata-specific” as possible, but aspects of the design also resemble their work in other countries.³⁰ The design consists of a series of stacked boxes made from multi-colored transparent bricks. The space will convey a feeling of openness and transparency, and from some levels visitors will be able to look down into other galleries.³¹ The shape brings to mind elements of Herzog and de Meuron’s recent design for the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis as well as one of their current projects, the expansion of Tate Modern. One description of the Walker addition could easily have been written about the design for KMOMA or the new Tate: “a complex set of solids and voids that push, suggesting inherent energy, to a surface membrane that is taut and translucent.”³² In these designs, the boxes pushing out of a central structure suggests the desire of the institution to extend its activities beyond the traditional white cube and into public space in new ways.

At this point the KMOMA trust is focused on raising money to build the museum building, and plans for the future acquisition of artworks are not yet firm. Typical of other new museum projects around the world, more attention is being focused on the building and what it symbolizes about Kolkata’s place in the hierarchy of global cities than the acquisitions and curatorial choices that will be made after it is completed. KMOMA’s dual identity as a modern and “altermodern” institution, trying at once to make up for a historical lack and also leapfrogging over outmoded models of the museum in favor of something radically new, epitomizes recent economic and cultural trends in India.³³ Despite its somewhat contradictory impulses, KMOMA may still be a productive model for future collaborations between the Indian government and the private sector, and serve as a symbol of Kolkata’s increasing participation in global economic and cultural networks. As Geeta Kapur has reflected, in a country strapped for funds and for curatorial expertise, KMOMA “promises to be a beautiful shell that hopefully will evolve a content.”³⁴

Conclusion

Raqs Media Collective, a group of three artists based in New Delhi, recently noted that the absence of strong modern and contemporary art institutions in India can be seen as a kind of productive lack—an opportunity for new, more political, and more diffuse forms of cultural action. They write:

If the museum and the large cultural institution were to contemporary art what the fixed landline telephony infrastructure was to telecommunication, what might be the equivalent of mobile telephony? ... How can the paucity or dereliction of museums and large art institutions, of spectacular events and festivals in some parts of the world, be seen not as a liability but as an asset?³⁵

This statement suggests that India does not need large new art museums, but rather alternative kinds of “interstitial institutions,” art networks spread throughout the city. Despite the power of this utopian idea, it is likely that new modern and contemporary art museums will continue to be built in the near future. Museums are closely tied to the art market and also do what other kinds of arts organizations, networks, and residency programs cannot: shape and preserve a collection of artworks and exhibit them in the public sphere. However, a wide variety of new museum models are being created across the country, from hybrid

²⁹ Lakshmi Indrasimhan, “Future Systems,” *Tehelka Magazine*, Vol.5, Issue 21 (31 May 2008).

³⁰ “Tate Modern to city museum of art- Celebrated firm to build Calcutta Project,” *The Telegraph*, Kolkata, 13 May 2008.

³¹ Das, interview.

³² Andrew Blauvelt, ed. *Expanding the Center: Walker Art Center and Herzog & de Meuron* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2005) 15.

³³ Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant* (New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2009).

³⁴ Kapur, “Where to Look.”

³⁵ Raqs Media Collective, “Earthworms Dancing: Notes for a Biennial in Slow Motion,” *Eflux*, July 2009, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/69>.

commercial/experimental gallery spaces, to corporate collections, to public/private partnerships, and has resulted in the diffusion of attention away from the national museums towards a variety of smaller institutions, allowing for more experimentation. Perhaps museums can be like mobile phones after all—non-hierarchical, rapidly evolving, and capable of connecting their users in new and unexpected ways.

In conclusion, new art museums in India are a part of a broad array of cultural, social, and economic changes. Both the Devi Art Foundation and the Kolkata Museum of Modern Art can be viewed pessimistically as institutions mainly concerned with the museum's ability to produce cultural capital and serve as a status symbol for a city and its new wealthy elite. However, they can also be viewed optimistically as examples of "glocalization," a process that involves reconfiguring international museum models and practices for specific local contexts and creating a platform to simultaneously address local, national, and transnational audiences. New museums face a number of looming challenges, including how to raise funds in the midst of the global economic downturn, how to attract diverse audiences, and how to negotiate the relationship of traditional and popular culture with global contemporary art. However, through their architecture, collecting practices, and institutional missions, they are striving to invent new museum models reflective of today's globalized culture. This is just the beginning of the story, and it will be fascinating to see how these spaces evolve in the years to come.