



PANEL DISCUSSION 3: CURATORSHIP

DATE: 7 SEPTEMBER 2024
TIME: 11:00 - 13:30
VENUE: HIDDINGH HALL

Panellists:

- Antonio Araujo
- Quito Tembe
- Carole Umulinga Karemera
- Ana Copete
- Bernard Akoi-Jackson

Chaired by Dr Portia Malatjie

Panelists will reflect on their own practice within the contexts of curation and international collaboration and volunteer specific ideas towards the development of a kind of manifesto for curation and international, specifically south-south collaboration.

Preamble

Traditionally art works from the global South, curated outside of the South (Europe and America mainly), seem to be part of the project of establishing a kind of 'global museum' characterized by a curious paradox of inclusion and othering. I draw too from Rolando Vasquez's notion that:

The museum cannot be seen as a neutral institution; it is an expression of the modern/colonial power. It holds epistemic and aesthetic power by determining the canon, and by configuring a history of aesthetics as primarily the history of the West. Concurrently, in its coloniality the museum functions as a tool of exclusion, to establish the aesthetic canons while erasing other worlds, other forms of sensing and meaning.

When they do represent the other, modernity's function of the museum takes the form as subjectification. The museum is not made for publics that are located on the other side of the colonial difference. When they do represent, museums, engage in classifying them,

speaking about them, but not serving them and considering them as spectators: they, the other, are the ones that are seen, not the ones that are privileged to see.

The creation of the museum structure attests to this as do the titles of several of these spaces: *Wereld van Culturen, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, Show me the World, Season Africa, Afrovibes, Afri-Koln* amongst many. I am of course conflating festivals and museums here as well. Specific curation within these institutions may undermine the patriarchal, colonial impulse inherent in such a project as N'gone Fall did with the French Season Africa and the dangers of ongoing abnegation that are evident in the title of these structures. Curation for example may link this export of African culture as part of connecting with seminal conceptual ideas or perhaps to the diaspora and not simply 'showing' Africa. This then talks to notions of **entanglement and collaboration** instead of simply parading artists and art works from other parts of the world, or a mechanistic dissemination of entertainment for the publics.

In this contemporary moment, international collaboration is vital, not as a mere flirtation with other cultures, but a necessary examination of power, and our role in this extraordinary wielding of power as artists and activists, coming as we do from various parts of the world, and at the coal face of the many challenges of our times. The question then at the heart of international collaboration and our unexpected relations, becomes not a simple one of partnering with someone and creating art that re-presents political or social justice issues, but may need to ask for much more:

- drawing into insular art worlds broader contexts of geopolitics,
- the use of culture to legitimize power,
- the complex nature of embodiment and its productive, and challenging, entanglement with other bodies.

Our assumptions as they are constructed by political contexts that host us as curators and artists ask us to be vigilant, curious, and undaunted by political systems that create false imaginaries of tradition, the modern, and aesthetic sophistication amongst others, and consider a movement that could impact in how we collectively continue to live ethically, hold, and protect our art, our world and each other.

At the core of this desire to on the one hand, hold *the cultures of the world* in one building and on the other to participate in the wilful abnegation and alienation of people that emerge from these nations, is at the heart of modernity.

Vazquez as do decolonial theorists, distinguishes the internal history of the West - where modernity starts with the industrial revolution, from the non-Western history of the West which locates the start of modernity in 1492, the onset of colonialism, when this distinction between what was primitive and what was modern starts to take shape. He writes

Before 1492, there was no Western 'project of civilisation', but a Europe at the margins of the world. It is colonization that enables the West and Europe to understand itself as the locus of enunciation, as a place that holds the power of representation. 1492 would enable the West to represent itself as the centre of the world.

It follows then that for countries that have been colonized who are interested in collaboration, we cannot afford for modernity to limit productive engagement if modernity is coextensive with coloniality and we do not want to become part of a system that has been built upon *the erasure of other worlds, wordlessness, and the wasting away of earth, or earthlessness.* (Vazquez).

So, these and other blind spots and missteps in our efforts at collaborations do ask us to think more deeply about how nations, states, and borders are made – and to be mindful of a critique of art creation or choreography that simply mirrors intimately market-related, neo-liberal globalization. Should collaboration for us be more than the trading of art and artists, for buying and selling to wider markets?

Is there an alternative? In a world where we are able through technology to understand the nuances of geopolitics, its manipulation of technology, image, power, and finance, is there something else we do and more importantly how does this impact unequal power relations?

In an effort to pursue an alternate to North-South relationships, an axis that dominates largely because of colonial tracing and economics, there is then an intensifying interest in finding fresh paths. It is a time of geopolitical shifts of great significance with the emergence of the Anthropocene, Increasing Difficulties around Migration, and the re-inscription of Settler Colonialism.

The shifts in the work of artists from the global South towards decoloniality, ancient and sacred practices, spirituality, healing and activism asks for exchange. The shifts in interest in for example Afro- South American connections with the African continent is a significant cue to develop and grow our connectivity. The Global South is diverse in many ways in terms of our economics and languages -yet so similar especially in our experiences of coloniality. Recent global crises have revealed how necessary it is to structure multi-polar relationships based on a synergy of energies, goals, and common principles of humanity and generative global citizenry.