

Edited by Paula Marincola

CURATING NOW: IMAGINATIV

The  
Pew Center  
for Arts  
& Heritage

QUESTIONS OF PRACTICE

***Curating Now: Imaginative  
Practice/Public Responsibility***  
**Afternoon Session:**  
**Saturday, October 14, 2000**

Edited by Paula Marincola

PHILADELPHIA EXHIBITIONS INITIATIVE



CURATING NOW AFTERNOON SESSION SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2000

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts





## INVENTING NEW MODELS FOR THE MUSEUM AND ITS AUDIENCES

Kathy Halbreich > Director, *The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis*



When I was told my talk would be about, and this is a quote, “The challenges of integrating the demands of fund-raising, audience development, education and interpretation, public relations, etc., with the imperatives of creative, scholarly, and innovative curating,” and that I should speak for an hour, I panicked. I wasn’t certain I had entertained enough long thoughts in the last few years to justify standing here for that long.

Confession number one: This director’s life is no longer centered on reflection. I profoundly miss the slowness of time, but seem to spend my days moving rapidly from topic to topic in a topical manner; running for meetings downtown and to dinners around town; shooting from the hip and sometimes leaving others to mop up, because I’m not even certain what the target is; intuitively responding and speaking in sound bytes; and, oddly enough, for someone who grew up in a field inhabited by things that are the physical embodiment of ideas and values, living vicariously.

Confession number two: Some days, it seems that my pleasure is sublimated in the pleasure of others. A not entirely undesirable state of being, but one I’m not certain I want to adjust to. The vision thing gets done in the darkness of night, when I wake myself talking to myself. It gets hashed out, remade, and refined with the staff I truly love and am comfortable arguing with, and a board I know respects us, loves the institution, and wants its city to be competitive. Every day, I wander into the curators’ offices that surround mine—I resist being on the floor with administration—and I go there just to schmooze. I confess I am jealous of the curators whose work I so much admire, because it grows out of time, usually a long time, spent understanding how another human being ticks. (See how even my metaphors relate to the clock?) Regrettably, speed is *time* for me these days. I confess I’m wistful about time—its passing, the real luxury that having some more of it would be, the twin necessities of reflection and dreaming, both of which demand desire and leisure. And I’m not going to even mention family. Suffice it to say, the best museum director probably is an unwed celibate with a gift for marketing.

Confession number three: There aren’t even enough hours in a day to do what I’m supposed to do, as well as to learn how to do what I don’t already know, which is lots. For instance, this month someone mentioned they were waiting for a liquidity event. Now, I can tell you this phrase has nothing to do

with either the *Raft of Medusa* or adult diapers; however, it does have to do with the possibility of completing a capital campaign.

Once the panic subsided a bit, I realized that you all had actually provided me with something crucial—a way to make the fleeting thoughts that occur to me in the dark of night comprehensible to myself.

Confession number four, and it is the final one: It is clear to me that the creative pleasures I once gleaned from my curatorial work have been replaced by my desire to reinvent the social role the Walker plays in the life of our community, in tandem with my desire to create a reasonably nonhierarchical workplace that is equitable, respectful, and mission-driven. We were, for instance, one of the first local companies—and I use that word judiciously—to offer benefits to domestic partners, when the board agreed it was the right thing to do, nearly nine years ago. It was actually one of the first things I asked them to do. I've tried in my comments to weave together the social and artistic strands that shape the Walker's mission and my job.

We've just crossed into a new century, in which the rate and dimension of change promises to test all our powers of invention. Invention will be everyone's new business, and cultural institutions should capitalize on their currency in this domain. Change itself can be measured by the speed of the Internet, a conduit for an increasingly global network of competing values that exist in a virtual space without hierarchy or agreed-upon standards of civic discourse. While that's neither good nor bad news, it does offer cultural institutions a new set of challenges and opportunities. We must adapt to become a filter, through which some of these competing worldviews can be debated and new communities established.

I understand that change can be threatening to us all: for trustees, some of whom cringe at noise in the galleries, while others wonder why we just don't give our guests what they want; for directors, some of whom think a business model built on Impressionism of any sort and season is a populist strategy, while others wonder how to compete with collectors in an inflated market and, sometimes, our own board members, for new acquisitions; for curators, some of whom are confused about how to gain global insights when their travel budgets are minuscule, while others watch their dot com classmates travel first class; for visitors, some of whom find the naked body in a photograph a startlingly different creature from the nude painted on the Greek urn, while others wonder why we've left popular culture outside our gated community; for funders, some of whom think they should lead the field, while others believe it's healthier to follow; and even for artists, some of whom are devitalized when a museum structure proves pliable enough to make subverting it less interesting, while others consider building community a way of making sculpture.

Even though I know change demands that we set new priorities, that we stress recently acquired and consequently unseasoned values over old ones, and divide precious resources differently, I like to think of change as a process of multiplying possibility rather than subtracting things that matter. While I admit that sometimes it's not so easy for our traditional audiences to understand initially what's been added so much as what's been taken away, we must not let our faith in what's aesthetically, intellectually, and socially necessary falter. It is crucial for all of us to remember that we entered this field because at least some part of our psyche was mesmerized by invention, by the ways in which artists often simultaneously make visible the values we prize, while insisting that we question our own perceptions. We, too, must use Januslike vision, with one eye that of the skeptic and the other the convert, to reevaluate those traditions and histories that have shaped our institutions as we re-create them for the twenty-first century. We need to make a case to ourselves, our publics, and our politicians for change, not the status quo or stasis—two words that seem perilously close to the status some of us have enjoyed.

In considering the ways in which museums are changing, and how the role of director as well as the expectations of the visitor are shifting, I'll use the Walker as a model. I want to stress, however, that every institution's mission must be carefully calibrated to reflect the aspirations, ambitions, and needs of its own community. Our mission statement states, "The Walker is a catalyst for the creative expression of artists and the active engagement of audiences." Now, I'll just digress here for a minute. I was very surprised this morning at how few times the words "audience" or "visitor" came up in the conversation. Back to the mission. "Focusing on the visual, performing, and media arts of our time, the Walker takes a global, multidisciplinary, and diverse approach to the creation, presentation, interpretation, collection, and preservation of art. Walker programs examine the questions that shape and inspire us as individuals, cultures, and communities." That mission really is our mantra. I believe if you were to go through the institution, people could quote it to you.

We are the only major cultural institution in the United States persistently engaged in establishing the relationship among artistic activities that occur in the light and dark spaces of galleries and theaters, between static and moving pictures, between real, virtual, and fictive time, and in our own community as well as countries as diverse as China, Brazil, South Africa, and Germany. As a multidisciplinary institution with an increasingly global focus and curatorial departments in the visual arts, performing arts, film and video, and new media, I believe we are uniquely positioned to participate in the congruence of these disciplines in an increasingly digital twenty-first century; to expose our audiences to a wide spectrum of related ideas across the disciplines—from down the street as well as

around the globe; and to provide artists with the necessary resources to make new work without regard to the traditional disciplinary or departmental hierarchies within most museum structures.

We offer our increasingly diverse audiences multiple points of entry, with an active exhibitions program that champions the new or gives alternative context to the old. Like a great university, we should be involved in creating pockets, if not laboratories, for research into our social, economic, cultural, and intellectual lives. Those laboratories can be exhibitions, such as some of those we have traveled to fifty-eight other museums in the last five years. I love Joseph Beuys's statement, "I want to make museums into universities with departments for objects," except that I'm not certain we should divide the objects into separate departments.

Clearly, one way to expand and diversify our audiences is through the support of different disciplines. With the largest museum-based performing-arts program in the country, the Walker's activities often include commissioning new work in new music, theater, and dance. Some of these are failures, others transitions, and a few are truly markers of our age. If you support artists, you support the range of possibilities, and it becomes important to permit our audiences in on a little secret: Not everything they're exposed to is of equal significance. The pleasure can be in the unfolding of a process over time and in a long-term relationship.

Our film-video department brings the best practitioners of both studio and independent productions to town for dialogues and screenings, including, for instance, Chen Kaige, the great Chinese director, before he won the Golden Palm at Cannes (and I stress that *before*). Our new media department, singled out as the national leader in the field by the *New York Times*, developed ArtsConnectEd, a collaboration with the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, which was voted the Best Educational Museum Website at the International Museums and the Web Conference in 1999. During the past six months, 884,000 visitors spent 109,000 hours viewing more than 5.6 million pages on the Walker's website. Despite a huge investment in the educational components on our site, many virtual visitors gravitate toward Gallery 9, the museum's online gallery for digital art. I've begun to wonder how we will distinguish between our online and on-site visitors in the future. But since more than eighty-five percent of our online visitors are from out of state, with twenty percent coming from out of the country, I'm not worried that we're cannibalizing our own visitor base.

As we move forward, I believe the classical distinctions between media and disciplines will continue to blur. Our tasks will be to recontextualize and treasure the artistic accomplishments of this century as we support the possibilities inherent in the next one, and discover new criteria by which to make our judgments.

I remember looking at an early prototype of a section of our website and finding that the quality of its design was banal. When I mentioned this to the head of our new media department, he agreed it was stylistically challenged, but suggested I hadn't either acknowledged or explored another, perhaps more important criteria—the speed, density, and quality of its interactivity. This is something I think about in terms of all of our other programs. Our success depends upon our nimbleness or capacity to embrace change, coupled with a worldview that is both informed and open-minded. Curators no longer work in isolation from educators or audiences. Curatorial decisions often involve conversation with many partners: social service agencies, arts organizations, and schools. We organized an exhibition drawn from the Walker's permanent collection of the nearly complete set of more than four hundred multiples by Joseph Beuys, an artist whom I think we might all confess is a bit inscrutable. At the same time, we also organized a project on the Cass Lake Reservation, home to many Native Americans in northern Minnesota and a place where environmental concerns—a love of the earth—are highly developed. This collaboration involved thirty community organizations in planting more than one thousand trees as a way of extending a similar project Beuys had himself begun in an attempt to spread his ideas of how art can effect social and environmental change. A front-page article in the *Cass Lake Times*—I know we all do look to other journals for our success, but somehow this had real meaning to me—explained the artist's work, and asked community residents to mark their doors with a green ribbon if they wished to plant a tree in their yard. Curators and educators led the planting and the conversations that grew out of those efforts, which were really the point. The article ended with a quote from Beuys: "We shall never stop planting." That's a marvelous metaphor for the role of cultural institutions.

Similarly, we support more than twenty artists and residency projects each year, enabling artists to make new work in close proximity to their audiences. These residencies in visual, performing, and media arts are enormously time-consuming, ranging from multiple weeklong visits over a year to an intensive several days, to many visits over three years. They require that the curatorial staff, along with educators, be out of their offices a lot, talking with partners about what their organizations or neighborhoods need, what artists might best address those needs, and what resources can be channeled to the collaboration. The conversations are with politicians, community activists, immigrants, housing specialists, historians, you name it. For instance, choreographer and director Bill T. Jones and his company return to Minneapolis in April to continue working with local residents in the development of a new theater work. This second weeklong visit this year is part of the company's four-year initiative to develop audiences for modern dance, which involves an ongoing home-away-from-home commitment to the

Walker Art Center and the Twin Cities. Past visits have included lecture-demonstrations at a neighboring vocational school, and I can tell you that the guys—and they were primarily guys—were incredibly skeptical about hearing a “ballet dancer” talk. As only Bill can do, he left converts behind. It was a remarkable discussion, as were the talks with teens during a back-to-school open house that we run every year; seminars with religious leaders, which are something new for us, but, I think, particularly fascinating, given that we have spent some time being castigated as heathens because of some of the artists we have supported in the past; and a radio program broadcast from Lucille’s Kitchen, an African-American café, when Bill, in fact, raised the issue of the black church’s relationship to people with AIDS.

Gathering material for a new dance-theater work entitled *Loud Boy*, a contemporary interpretation of Euripides’s *The Bacchae*, the company will work with broad cross sections of the community to explore cultural and personal images of God, the thematic issue at the heart of the Greek tragedy. A series of discussions raising the question “What does your God look like?” will provide Bill with rich resource material from many different cultural perspectives, including Hmong and Somali, two of the most recent immigrant groups in Minneapolis. Additional workshops, master classes, a lecture-demonstration, and public showings of the work-in-process will take place at venues throughout the Twin Cities. The Walker has presented Bill T.’s company more than nine times over the years. He’s one of several artists across the disciplines to whom we’ve made a long-term commitment and with whom we will grow. His work was seen in the exhibition “Art Performs Life: Merce Cunningham, Meredith Monk, and Bill T. Jones,” which we organized, in 1998, to begin to understand how things that occur in real time can be translated to galleries.

Two awards, one local and one national, suggest how I hope our work in the community is meaningful, both in the neighborhoods around us and to the field. In 1998, we received a Quality of Life Award from the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce for a partnership with the Powderhorn Neighborhood Association, which results each year in an arts festival along Lake Street that celebrates the achievements of artists from near and far. The truth is, Lake Street is a most diverse network, bisecting the city from the Mississippi River to the urban ring of lakes. It is home to those who first settled Minneapolis and those who have arrived most recently. The festival has encouraged the redevelopment of one section of the street, giving vendors as well as residents much needed visibility and security. In some small way, this festival has resulted in the neighborhood’s economic turnaround. Two weeks ago, we received word that the Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund had selected us as one of fifteen organizations nationally to receive a grant of \$1.25 million to continue building new audiences.

We also have established a Global Advisory Board of colleagues: Walter Chakela, artistic director of the Windybrow Center for the Arts in Johannesburg; Vishakha Desai, vice president for programs for the Asia Society; Hou Hanru, a Chinese-born curator now living in Paris; Paulo Herkenhoff, director of the last São Paulo Biennale and adjunct curator at MoMA; Vasif Kortun, an independent curator from Istanbul; Hidenaga Otari, a performing-arts critic from Tokyo; and Baraka Sele, producer for the World Festival at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. The committee meets at the Walker twice a year, for five days, with curators, educators, and designers, to critique our programs, to help expand the global and disciplinary range of our collection, and to plan a collaboration and a multidisciplinary project for year three. But what we really do collectively is stop, leave our offices, and grapple—sometimes with painful delicacy, other times with robust giddiness—with such questions of expertise and practice as, how do we interpret the global for the local? What changes are necessary in interpretative strategies to help our audiences understand work from different cultures? What is the role of art in your culture? What are the leading forms of artistic practice and entertainment? What is the relationship between artists and audiences? And, why is it so common that the language of exchange for global projects is English?

A recent agenda focused on the Walker's collection, recognizing that the works we acquire should become the permanent demonstration of the viability of our discussions. While we must put our money where our mouths are, this is not simply a matter of reallocating acquisition funds. As the focus of the collection, certainly through the eighties, was on North America and Europe, how do we begin to understand, then, even where to begin collecting? Is it possible that a collection that is more about hyperlinks or simultaneity than linearity is the collection of the future? How do we provide a larger context for understanding the significance of work that is shaped by cultural values remote to many of our traditional visitors? Parenthetically, I wrote that last question before going to hear the superintendent of the Minneapolis school system, who mentioned that there are more than eighty languages spoken in the public schools in Minneapolis today. As we begin to really look at who we are serving, we will find that no matter where we live, it is a more diverse community than we probably imagined.

The curators at the Walker have begun to recognize that there is no homogeneous definition of what constitutes a work of art, or what the useful, evaluative criteria might be across cultures. While Western cultures have traditionally placed a high value on such avant-garde classifications as innovation and individuality, other cultures, particularly those under siege or particularly fragile, have underscored the preservation of traditions and the engagement of community. We've begun to make progress in incorporating some more traditional work, albeit work that tends to be self-consciously balancing the old and new in our

performing arts programs, but we're still struggling to understand its place within the exhibition program and collection.

As an international institution with increasingly broad and deep connections to neighborhoods that surround us, the Walker seeks to make visible the sometimes competing and often complementary values of the diverse cultures that compose our community and the world we share. I like to think we are a safe place for ideas, some of which may challenge our individual assumptions about what's good and what's bad, what's meaningful and what's not. I agree with somebody this morning who talked about the word "nice." I often say that nice is great for above your couch, thank you, but it's not a great institutional mission.

It's important to remember that the nineteenth-century definitions of quality, which surfaced in Europe, presumed a cohesive and homogeneous worldview. Consequently, most Western museums have assumed an aesthetic hierarchy in which painting and sculpture are elevated above other media, and in which popular culture is rejected. Modernism also is often equated with a dependence on stylistic and formalistic analysis, an approach most rigidly expressed in the phrase "art for art's sake," which first appeared in 1818. Considerations relating to the autobiography of the maker, the function of the artwork, the social context in which the artwork was made, or the economic conditions that prevailed were often denied. But as we enter the twenty-first century, we all recognize that we live in an increasingly hyperlinked time, and in a world that is far from homogeneous. Henry Kaufman—he's a funny person for me to quote—but the economist Henry Kaufman wrote something that indeed has shaped our thinking: "Understanding cultural diversity is perhaps one of the greatest challenges of our global interdependence. As economic borders disintegrate and political borders shift, what remains are cultures."

But these cultures are wrapped in difficult histories, which museums often either segregate or sweep under the rug. From February 20 through March 13, 1999, master artists from China, Japan, Korea, and the United States were in residence at the Walker, offering a wide range of community activities while concluding the final development of *Forgiveness*, a major, new work commissioned with the Asia Society, in New York, which premiered at the Walker. This music-dance-theater piece examines a pain-filled twentieth century of inter-Asian conflict marked by war and peace, unspeakable atrocities, the past dream of a united Asia, and slow movement toward reconciliation. The diversity of artistic collaborators—among them a Chinese director, Japanese Noh master, Korean dancer, American composer, Korean singer, Japanese-American percussionist, and Chinese Peking-Opera performer—reflected the larger challenge of communication (with three different translators speaking four languages running back and forth between artists) but also the complexity of various stylistic conventions and

historical relationships among these countries and peoples. The differences and variations of a given word in each language—forgiveness, or shame, or guilt—became points of departure in developing the piece.

The accompanying residency programs brought a level of interaction with the community that was an important component of the project, and probably forestalled political demonstrations protesting the sensitive histories covered in the piece. And I confess that I barely knew what these historical sensitivities were when we began this project. Each activity was created in collaboration with new as well as established community partners, who sometimes have no tradition of working together. Because of the historical problems between, say, the Japanese and Korean peoples, they had little desire to do so. Often, Walker programmers, when planning events, had to move carefully between these painful histories. In the case of one young Walker staff member, they became personal when a Korean partner, turning to her to walk to dinner, said he had never imagined eating with a Japanese person.

The artists participated in numerous residency activities, including master classes in which they compared their respective theater traditions, meet-the-artist interviews on the making of *Forgiveness*, and humanities panels on the concept of forgiveness within the historical context of Asia and World War II. In addition, the cast and crew were given dinners by local community members, including the director of the Korean-American Today and Tomorrow Center, a member of the Walker's Community Advisory Neighborhood Group, a member of the Chinese-American Society of Minnesota, and artists from Theater Mu, a theater company that supports Asian performing arts. Ultimately, it wasn't only the Walker that cemented new relationships—each of the communities involved also had conversations with each other that, perhaps, might not have happened except through art.

Since the Walker is singular in its support of commissioning new work by artists across the disciplines, I'd like to suggest our future by quoting Marcel Duchamp, who reminds us that “the creative act is not performed by the artist alone: The spectator brings the work in contact with the external world, deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications, and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.” This quote maps a direction described in our long-range plan: The Walker is to be “a pioneering, twenty-first-century, multidisciplinary center with audience engagement and experiential learning at its core,” whereby it “will become a pleasurable destination—real and virtual—that is not event-dependent.”

A recent article in the *Harvard Business School Review* highlighted the emergence of a new entertainment economy by which sneakers are sold through stores that provide more experiences than figuring out your shoe size. We have something to learn from this, but corporations should not be the only institutions

telling our stories, providing our experiences, and animating our communities.

I hope our model subverts that of the Mall of America, in Minnesota, one of the main destinations of both teenagers and tourists, but I also know I can't ignore it, or the interactive model that science museums present. Consequently, in the future, the Walker will provide our audiences with multiple opportunities for inquiry and discovery personalized by each participant. Many stories, artistic disciplines, histories, interpretative strategies, and databases can be connected to create richer, more contextual, and interactive links between art and life. We are using new models for thinking about how information can be presented and personalized, some of which have arisen along with new technologies. We hope to provide daily access to the artist's creative process across the disciplines, with new spaces devoted to each art form. Imagine watching a new dance or musical composition evolve, seeing the choices an artist makes along a creative trajectory. This is what could happen in a technologically sophisticated performing-arts studio. We hope to provide greater access to institutional resources, such as our now-private library, and I would wager that most of our libraries in museums are private, which startles me. Imagine, at least, a public reading room that is organized around changing curatorial programs. And, finally, we really hope to create the most inviting public space in the Twin Cities—a sensory environment animated by community conversations of an artistic, civic, and critical nature.

The Walker Art Center's emerging plan for an expanded facility and expanding engagement strategies will make visible the fact that we are more than a museum, recognizing that the word "center" suggests a focal point of activity and conversation. We want to change the metaphor for a museum from temple to town square. We aim to magnify the ways in which visitors to the Walker can become more active participants in a series of memorable experiences based on discovering the links between art and life, as well as among multiple artistic disciplines. We know from our research that visitors seek more active engagement with living artists, in a universe of content and information more easily tailored to each individual's knowledge, desire, and style of learning. Some people, for instance, learn more through oral or written communication, others through tactile or kinetic experience. All learning styles are, at present, incorporated into our educational efforts, but need to be brought into the design of the expansion itself. Just as there are many forms of intelligence, there are many approaches to engagement, ranging from the individual's meditative experience to the interactive conversation, to the "a-ha" of collective discovery.

Here, it might be useful to note that we have spent enormous intellectual and financial resources, including a very generous commitment from The Pew Charitable Trusts, in Philadelphia. Some of the rewards of this work can be seen in the fact that attendance since 1993 has risen twenty-eight percent, to nearly

one million people in 1999. If anyone still thinks cultural institutions are elite and remote, let me say that thirty-six percent of our annual visitors have household incomes below \$25,000; fifteen percent are people of color, a population that was not even measured when I first came to the Walker ten years ago; and ten percent are teenagers, also a population not measured when I moved to the Walker. The teenagers are not coming with school groups. They are self-selecting the Walker as their place for conversation.

Although the search for certainty remains with us as we end a century in which many geographic, psychological, scientific, and even spiritual absolutes were tested, the open-ended miracle of the arts is that they allow each of us to form our own answers and find our own meaning. I'm sure that doesn't seem a provocative statement to anyone here today. In principle, it shouldn't be, but in practice it can be. All of you know that last year, in New York City, a creative center admired for its open-minded spirit, the mayor withheld public funding from the Brooklyn Museum because he found a painting by Chris Ofili "sick" and "offensive" to Christian values. (And I think the Christian values also were in quotes.) If the mayor had, perhaps, taken the time to recognize the cultural conditions that shaped the intricate painting of a black Madonna made by a Catholic artist of African descent, he might have come to recognize that the dung affixed to and supporting the painting is not simply excrement, as he called it. He might have considered that the cutout images of female genitalia from men's magazines were there not so much to titillate as to critique. Given the fact that dung is a precious material and a sign of fertility in some cultures, the mayor could have seen this painting as a celebration of the sacred against a backdrop of the West's rather persistent degradation of female sexuality to sell everything from cars to cigarettes. The question, then, is certainly about the democratic principle of freedom of expression, but it also seems to be about cultural differences, authority (both curatorial and political), society's tolerance for both ambiguity and provocation, and the role of cultural institutions within the civic life of their communities.

That being said, I also worry when either the controversial or the already well-worn creates the popular, and when the popular is the most significant sign of our success. I'm happy when our numbers are good, but I'm happier when the engagement is repeated and deep. That's one measure of success in our new plan. I worry when we lose our focus, treating audiences with less respect than they deserve.

Doubtless, we will spend more time communicating, learning, and creating online, yet I believe the desire for a sense of community, as well as a safe place to discuss and debate those values that separate and bind, will become stronger. Are we strong enough as institutions to embrace those controversies, to establish a framework for such debates? Our collective efforts to support the creative

expression of artists in the active engagement of audiences depends upon just such courage.

The true miracle we share, I believe, is best stated by a group of fifteen teens from six local high schools who studied at the Walker three days a week for four months to make a film called *The Listening Project*, which served as an introduction to our permanent collection. These students found that there were five approaches to looking at and understanding contemporary art: questioning, listening, responding, challenging, and dreaming—a wonderfully cogent way of describing the methods for confronting the unfamiliar. One student told me she learned “not to accept spoon-fed solutions,” while another said her experience “forced me to change the ways I see history, culture, and the news.” That idea, indeed, should be our collective mission as we move forward into the twenty-first century. By the way, I just saw one of these students, who’s now a graduate student, at an opening the other night. She’s returned home from RISD, and she was amazed that I remembered her after all this time. I was struck that so much time had elapsed since I last saw her presentation on Jana Sterbak’s *Flesh Dress for an Anorexic Albino*, when she was a high school sophomore. One of the things that’s remarkable about these kids is that every time I talk about them, somebody inevitably raises a hand and says to me, “But these are really special kids.” What I want to tell you is that these are everybody’s kids.

In closing, I want to read the words of Maggie Perez, one of the twelve members of this year’s Teen Arts Council at the Walker, and a junior in high school, who is episodically homeless. The council worked closely with Glenn Ligon, an artist who incorporates text, primarily by African-American authors, into his paintings. Glenn asked the students to use the techniques of sampling often found in today’s rap music, but which I associate with, perhaps inaccurately, Picasso’s collages, to study the permanent collection in order to produce their own work and a label for it. Some of the students’ work was on view in the Andersen Window Gallery, in the permanent collection galleries. It’s a gallery that provides a context for the collection, and it’s a hybrid meeting place and media-reading room as well. Maggie’s piece, which she titled *Below Suspicion*, is a multimedia work that includes “photocollage and sand mounted on plastic bag, with audiocassette transferred to audiodisk.” She incorporated ideas she found in Jud Nelson and Lee Bontecou’s sculptures, as well as a sound piece by English artist Christine Borland of a child reading the passage in Shelley’s *Frankenstein* in which the monster becomes aware that he is different from human beings. Maggie describes her work of art: “I was first inspired by Jud Nelson’s *Hefiy Two-Ply*, the ironic, marble sculpture of a trash bag. Quickly, I came up with a story about different forms of enclosure within people’s lives. It began as the story of a man trapped in a plastic bag and expanded from here. Christine

Borland really struck me with her work *The Monster's Monologue*, which is simply a voice coming from the wall, and this led to my vocal recording. During the making of my piece, a lot of outside influences became part of it. I watched a video about fractals, the geometric formulas for constructing anything from a cloud to a tree, to DNA. This prompted me to ask, when the answer to the ultimate question is found, is that God? I think the answers have always been right in front of us, even within us. This concept blends well with Lee Bontecou's *Untitled No. 38*, because it uses the mystery of holes, inner space, and darkness. I feel it enveloped its surroundings, paralleling my stories of enclosure. Finally, the sand I used is a symbol of the repetition of life. I collected it here in Minnesota, where, hundreds of millions of years ago, there once had been an ocean, its waters and sands teeming with living organisms." I think we should send Maggie to congress to advocate for us all.

Thank you for inviting me here today to stop, to linger, to collect my thoughts. What I wish for us all is the time to dig deeply, to ask good questions, and to share those things that make us more widely human.



## PANEL STATEMENTS AND DISCUSSION



**Ned Rifkin** > *Director, The Menil Collection and Foundation, Houston*

I want to compliment Kathy. That was an extraordinary presentation and an inspiration. I want to work for you.

I want to go back to Thelma's analogy. For over thirty years, I've been a lacto-ovo vegetarian, and, however, I have worked in museums that run the range from university museums, kunsthalle, the New Museum, a private museum in Washington, D.C., a Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C., which is sort of the inverse of that, and then a private museum that was, essentially, the museum for a city and a state. Now, at long last, I'm working for a private museum with a private foundation, and I guess what I would be is a "situational eater" in this circumstance. Or was I covering that the whole time?

The thing about the Menil Collection and Foundation, which I should say right off the top, is that, first of all, the foundation has existed since the fifties and was established not simply for art; in fact, it's very important that it's not simply for art. Originally, it was for human rights as well as religious and other activities. One of the major projects from the late sixties, as you probably all know, is the Rothko Chapel. For the record, it is not a part of our purview any longer, it was given to the foundation that now runs the Rothko Chapel. But that stands, in so many ways, as a paradigm for what the de Menil family was trying to do and to offer and imbue in Houston, Texas, at a very interesting time.

If you think back to the late sixties, they were not only putting African-American people up for public office; Mickey Leland was a board member of the Menil Foundation many years ago. Many of you know who I'm talking about, but, in case you don't, he was a very farsighted congressman from Houston, from, I believe, the third ward—it might be the fifth ward (I'm still learning my wards in Houston)—but he was killed tragically in an airplane crash, I believe, going to Africa on a mission. (I want to say five to ten years ago.) My main point is that the spirit of the foundation is very much attuned to what the Walker is trying to take up and, clearly, planning, which is to see art in a context, a much larger social and cultural context, and, even in the case of the Menil, a religious context as well, that enables people to find inspiration, to find a place for meditation, reflection with art so that art becomes an apparatus to leverage perception, seeing, knowing, and exploration.

I feel extremely fortunate to be put in charge of that, but also quite daunted by the legacy that we are now responsible for stewarding. What I want to say mostly is that while I've worked in all these different museums in the past, it's fascinating that all of these museums are situation-specific—that is, you have a vision, you have a belief system. Sometimes, it's provocative, sometimes it's contrary. But whatever you do, it's within the context of what that situation is, and you try, as all of us here do, to expand that, to make it more available, to widen it and deepen it, to use your word, Kathy.

One of the things about the Menil Collection, which is different from the Menil Foundation—but I won't take our time today for that; I may in a footnote later—is that its holdings run from 15,000 B.C. to approximately the present (not quite the present). But that's not unimportant either. Most of us know that the Menil Collection has extraordinary Barnett Newmans and Magrittes, and that the Menils were patrons who commissioned artists and were engaged in supporting artists in the old sense of patronizing—that is, giving stipends to surrealist artists Max Ernst and René Magritte and others. They were supporters of contemporary art, again, in depth and with a mind to really break out of the mold—Mark Rothko being another good example, and, more recently, Cy Twombly, one of our great living artists.

Admission to the collection is free, and what I've come to realize about that is the following: The Menil Collection is, perhaps, not for everyone, in the way it's presented and the way it's offered forward, but it is for anyone, and that is a very significant part of what I perceive to be the legacy of John and Dominique de Menil. What we are experiencing right now—and I say, “we,” because I've been there eight months, so I really do feel very much that I am a part of that experience—is the shift from a powerful, individual patron, someone who had vision, but who also, as someone said earlier today, was not afraid to make mistakes—and, in terms of the collection, they made plenty of “mistakes.” People don't see them; they're usually upstairs or even downstairs, where we keep the less likely works to be put on view. But even storage as a concept was elevated and meant to be instructive; it was put there as what she called a “treasure house.” The idea is that creativity of artists, ambition and boldness—not so much innovation, but boldness—of the patron could work to converge in a way that would be singular in some manner of speaking. It would represent an individual, or, in this case, a couple's vision of what art could be in the late twentieth century, the second half of the twentieth century. The idea of commissioning artists—Mrs. de Menil's last commission was Dan Flavin. A lot of people don't realize that we have a space dedicated to Dan Flavin as well. The point is that, throughout Dominique de Menil's lifetime, she was continuing to learn, continuing to grow and probe.

This is an inspiration for us, the stewards of that institution, and this is the

point as we're shifting from an individually driven private institution into a collectively stewarded institution, as it turns into a public resource. It isn't there yet, but we have the luxury in Houston of having a Museum of Fine Arts, the Contemporary Arts Museum, as well as Diverse Works, which is an alternative artist-run space, and the Blaffer Gallery, which is at the University of Houston. We have all of these different organizations doing different things, which frees us enormously to do what we believe is different and not to replicate. An example of this is that we don't have an education program as such. In fact, I wouldn't even call us a museum, quite honestly. The reason I left the High Museum of Art and other museums was to go to a place that decided it was not a museum but a collection and a series of projects and a foundation. It's such a different model as a museum-type of place. The key to our future, which we're just now planning, is to preserve those aspects that make us unique and different and to be sure to enhance that specialness: the rarity of going into a relatively unmediated experience without a lot of labels, without a lot of voiceover narratives, to see art in depth. We can turn it into a more conventional museum in easy order, but we haven't, since that would be such a pity. The challenge is trying to figure out what really differentiates us in so many ways. Our membership program costs us \$15,000 a year, just to give you an idea. Our bookstore costs us tens of thousands of dollars a year. It is a foundation that underwrites its own uniqueness. I'm not saying that that is right from the business standpoint, but it is right from a different standpoint. So, the problems that we face are trying to understand the relationship between commissioning not only art but new research by scholars and new research by artists, for that matter.

Mrs. de Menil, in her bequest to the foundation, left us her residence, which many of you know is a very early Philip Johnson building and a very important symbol, within our community, of modernism implanted into 1950 Houston, which is, to me, unimaginable right now. But that building, that home, and, frankly, what we have in the Menil Collection is not a museum but a home for art, a place where you can experience the intimate power of art as an encounter. This is a bit of an endangered species within the world of art museums.

I want to enter into this conversation in a meaningful way, having worked at other museums, but, in so many ways, the Menil Collection offers us a clear alternative to what museums were like and can still be like. The other little element I would add is that scale, not size, is what that place is about in the end, and that scale, perhaps, is something we need to replicate but not expand upon, if you understand the difference.



**Nicholas Serota** > *Director, Tate, London*

As is the way on these occasions, the panel met last night over dinner. We met in that rather extraordinary building whose collection you all know, the College of Physicians. As we left, Paula kindly gave each of us a small souvenir of the occasion, a replica of one of the accessory body parts that one might find in the museum. I couldn't help notice that the two Europeans, Hans-Ulrich Obrist and myself, were both given a growing brain. When I took it back to the hotel and read the instructions, it said to put the brain in water and it will take forty-eight hours to expand. So, I did, though some of you are in for a slight disappointment, because it's going to be another twenty-four hours before I can tell you what happens. Although, evidently, Hans-Ulrich Obrist put his in hot water.

This is not entirely an aside. I make no apology for continuing to believe that the curator represents and is, indeed, the brain within the museum, and the museum should continue to be a place of discourse, debate, reverie, enlightenment, and inspiration through an encounter with an object, which is a primary experience of a work of art. The museum is not a book and it is not many other things, some of which we discussed this morning and that we'll go on to talk about this afternoon. But it is, undoubtedly, a place of social interaction and it is a public space, which, in my view, should make it a fundamentally different experience from the experience of art within a commercial gallery. For the purposes of this discussion alone, I'm taking museum/kunsthalle as being, generically, one type of space contrasting with a commercial space. What should be the role of the curator in this public space? It has to be, as I say, the brain, to give structure to the experience, and to take responsibility—that is, to take responsibility for creating the frame through which the public will see and experience the work of art.

Very often, one goes to exhibitions—especially in Germany, at present—where you encounter a single room given over to a group of a single artist's work, and, adjacent to that, another room given over to another artist's work, and, adjacent to that, yet another ordered in the same way. These presentations undoubtedly reflect the aspirations of artists, but they also reflect the pattern and the structure of the gallery world. Such displays are not, in my view, museums; they do not place an intellectual construct over a range of objects. The responsibility of the curator is to make readings, to rethink history, and to show his or her hand. In the past, there was a sense of an institutional voice that controlled the way in which display was structured. Naturally, institutional attitudes inform many of the activities of the Tate, in London, or the Museum of Modern Art, in New York, but I believe that each of us, as curators, should be prepared to take a more personal responsibility and disclose our involvement in that when we

present our displays.

At the Tate, that means we now have wall texts that are signed by an individual curator, which helps to indicate that a personal view, a personal reading, is being made. No one objects to a directorial viewpoint in the theater. When they go to the National Theatre in London, they expect to hear and see Richard Eyre's or Trevor Nunn's view of *Hamlet*. They don't go to see the National Theatre view of *Hamlet*. The same should be true in museums. As Rob said this morning, to do this effectively, curators now need a huge range of skills or, at least, access to those skills: theory, history, marketing, publicity, interpretation, and, dare I say it, writing skills. Not all curators have all these skills. What is needed, above all, is an ability, as someone else said this morning, to listen, to pay attention to what others are doing and saying, but, nevertheless, to form a judgment and, in my opinion, to form a view. As Rob said, and rightly, it's not a question of the curator being top dog, but it is a question of the curator having his or her own view about the way in which these other traits, these other skills, are used in the service of art. Of course, the person to whom the curator should be listening most of all has to be the artist, and that applies not just to the curator of contemporary art but to the curator of classic modern art equally.

I remember meeting—Hans-Ulrich Obrist mentioned him briefly this morning—Willem Sandberg, early in my career, and being aware that this man who had directed the Stedelijk Museum, in Amsterdam, with such brilliance had always maintained very, very close links with artists. His successor, Edy de Wilde, was also close to artists. He was a director at the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, in Eindhoven, from, I think, 1946 until 1963, and then, for twenty-two years, director of the Stedelijk Museum, in Amsterdam, two of the great institutions in the Netherlands. In thirty years, he never built an extension or a museum building. The consequence was that when he came to make his final exhibition in 1985, it was an exhibition about art, made with artists, and not an exhibition about his achievements as the builder of a great architectural monument.

The role of the curator, in my view, is to create this frame. The purpose has to be to create a frame that will give confidence to the audience, confidence to follow their own judgments, confidence to respond to what they see, and, as someone said this morning, not simply to believe, necessarily, that all art is good for you or, necessarily, that all art is art that you or I will like. One of the most frequent questions I'm asked as director of the Tate is, "Do you like everything in this building?" Of course, the honest answer is no. Art is not simply a matter of like or dislike, it's a matter of responding to a whole set of experiences put together by another individual or group of individuals and responding to that. The curator has to try and mediate this work in a manner that reveals knowledge but does not intimidate. It's a matter, therefore, of using language in a way that

does not obscure, that is transparent, that tries to evoke associations in the mind of the viewer, of that member of the audience who will then use their own experience to come to terms with what it is on view. Of course, people respond in many different ways, and I'm not saying that everyone has to respond in precisely the way as the lady who wrote to me last week with a long list of every orifice and protuberance on the female and male form that appeared in works on view at Tate Modern.

Beyond the issue of the role of curator in mediating the display or exhibition, there are other questions about how we should build audiences. I'm not going to talk about marketing. Institutions build audiences by, as Kathy was suggesting, transparency in their program, making it evident what they are doing, and doing it consistently. We should not try to do everything. We should make it apparent that we are an institution that will show a particular kind of exhibition and we will do it repeatedly, so that we build an expertise in doing it well. The audience can come to count on us for doing that. We build an audience by the nature of our publications and our other forms of interpretation. We don't build an audience when we produce a catalog with twenty-five Ph.D. essays that precede 450 color plates. We need to make publications that reach a much broader section of our audience than is traditionally the case. We will achieve it by scoping and shaping the large catalogs, but also by producing other publications that are, as Rob said this morning, rooted in knowledge and scholarship. It is not a matter of simplifying or talking down. It has to be done by the person who knows most about the subject. We will, I believe, build audiences, especially for new work, by sometimes placing it in parts of the museum where people come across it, not having to search it out. Occasionally, we will do it by taking it outside the museum, as Tate Modern did, before it opened, in placing Shirin Neshat's *Turbulence* in a local church. That action raises further questions about the way in which the institution and the museum will operate in the future.

As Paul reminded us this morning, the museum is not simply an architectural space, it is a construct, it is an intellectual framework. Tate will operate not just within the buildings but in collaboration with the Open University, in collaboration with the BBC, working with a range of local schools, working with Afro-Caribbean groups in Brixton, or whatever. These are ways in which the museum will extend its reach into the community.

Any institution dealing with the twentieth century has to have a commitment to the present; history begins with the present. You cannot hold back from making judgments, from beginning to create the frame. You cannot wait for five years; otherwise, you allow others, including the commercial world, to establish history. You have to be in there, you have to be purchasing, and, above all, you have to be working with practicing artists.

Within the institution and the wider art world, the role of the director is very straightforward. It is, essentially, to resist—to resist the pressures from trustees, from commerce, from funding organizations, from curators who only wish to worry about their next job and write some obscure text that means a great deal to their prospective next employer but not to their readers. It means, essentially, holding on to the intellectual and ethical frame and structure of the institution. For an institution such as the Tate, which is there, essentially, to serve a public purpose, this means working to help people open and broaden their own lives and not, simply, our own.



**Anne d'Harnoncourt** > *The George D. Widener Director, Philadelphia Museum of Art*

It's hard to follow three very eloquent presentations, one of an admirable length, considerateness, and cogency throughout that length. Kathy was extraordinary. Thank God Rob Storr gave us, this morning, the right, maybe the obligation, to be corny, because, as I often am, it was a great relief to me.

I better say, right from the beginning, that if everybody is going to turn themselves from a temple into a town square, I'm stuck; there's nothing that's going to make the Philadelphia Museum of Art shed its stones. We just have to get the town square inside; in some wonderful, metaphorical ways, it already is inside us. It's also very nice to have that temple be the place that Marcel Duchamp chose to make his own traveling *Box in a Valise* a permanent fixture, contradicting everything one would have thought he would have wanted. When the chips were down, he went for the temple. When it comes to that, between the temple and a power plant, the power plant actually has the word "power" in the name. Clearly, my colleagues are asking themselves how they survive as directors with all the stuff going on, when they've got curatorial souls yearning to be free. One thing that does keep me sane is remembering a very early, very clean quote from Gilbert & George, to the effect that "to be with art is all we ask." I've always imagined it at the top of the steps leading up to the new entrance to the Sainsbury Wing of the National Gallery in London, inscribed right on the marble where, in times past, we would have inscribed the names Rembrandt and so forth.

One thing I do agree with, and I think it was Hans-Ulrich, this morning, who reminded us, is that we have to keep hold of our humility, because we do all tend to talk as if we were facing certain issues or certain problems for the first time, and we also tend to talk as if certain things had never happened before. It's great that Richard Flood, as a former art critic and gallerist, is at the Walker Art

Center. It was a fantastic appointment, but we need to remember that there was Tom Hess at the Met, and there was, before him, Bryson Burroughs, God help us, at the same place. In fact, one real thing that's emerged from this conversation in a wonderful way is that the issue of fluidity among curator, dealer, collector, and critic is very important. I hear Nick say that museum space is not a commercial space; at the same time, I think of spaces I know that one would call commercial spaces, because things were for sale even if nobody bought them, which were just as major spaces to see new art: the Bykert Gallery, for instance.

The world is full of patrons, collectors, and even trustees who ended up with some kind of curatorial voice in a museum, which was not altogether amiss, and, looking back, one could think of a good example, surely not a bad example, in Philadelphia that's useful to revisit. Henry McIlhenny organized seven of the biggest and best exhibitions the museum ever did, before becoming a trustee and then chairman of the board, and then leaving us his entire collection and a large purchase fund. If any one person does all that, the interlinking between collector and curator is great to think about.

We have to make barriers of one kind between various functions and, at the same time, we have to make sure those barriers are somewhat porous, because the worst thing is a hard-and-fast rule that you cannot break when it's to the advantage of the artist or the institution. I should put artists in that mix of fluidity, because, of course, artists are wonderful critics, and artists can be great curators—or they can't, as the case may be. But don't leave them out in this discussion of roles. It's also fun, and Ned has spoken about that eloquently from the point of view of the Menil Collection, which, in my view, represents the ideal. Whether it's the ideal museum, the ideal entity, the ideal whatever, it's an extraordinary and magical place; it's one in which the magic is very real and it's one to which we all aspire. Not the same kind of magic, but some similar kind of effect. Obviously, we're not here to talk today about my great preoccupation, which is the presence of contemporary art in the midst of an encyclopedic art museum—a big, old-fashioned, city encyclopedic art museum that is, on the one hand, very unwieldy and, on the other hand, very rich in the associations and ideas and encounters between the works of art that are there, let alone between the visitors and the works of art, which is what it's all about.

I drive the curators completely crazy—and there are several from Philadelphia in the room, so just close your ears, here she goes again—but one of the great opportunities is to have, for instance, in the same building, a floor apart, two extraordinary paintings about fire. One is Turner's *Burning of the Houses of Parliament* and the other is Cy Twombly's *The Fire That Consumes All Before It*, part of his *Fifty Days at Ilium*. The art history books are horrified, but there is something very stimulating about this juxtaposition. It's why we're continually

bringing artists into encyclopedic museums, to look at them in a very different way than curators do, than educators do, than conservators do, because there are connections we need to make and also that our public might make on its own, and often does, that we don't even see. The presence of contemporary art in a big, old-fashioned, public museum, as I think of ourselves, or the Art Institute of Chicago, or the Met, or Cleveland, it's invaluable, it's invigorating, it's subverting. It also makes every artistic encounter, in a way, more valuable and more pointed, because the living artist's presence, in whatever medium they work, in a big, old-fashioned, art museum, makes the old-fashionedness a bit less and also makes some of the old-fashionedness, perhaps, in a way, more valuable.

One of the issues of temple vs. town square—I'm coming back to that for a moment because it struck me very much—is the question about places that are quiet, places that are noisy, places where there's lots of conversation, and places where there's little—that the temple metaphor shouldn't be all negative. Maybe, we have an immediate aversion to—I don't know if it's a Greek temple or whether it's Chartres, or whatever, but do we have the same feeling about Ryōan-ji and that current exhibition in Philadelphia (which I hope all of you will have a chance to see tomorrow) devoted to a seventeenth-century Japanese artist that feels, in many ways, very contemporary, and has been admired a lot by very contemporary artists. One of the challenges of being a curator in the twenty-first century—Nick talked about it very eloquently—is that we, in a sense, need to go back to the slightly greater fluidity of the past. I was much more boringly educated to end up as a museum director than my father. He never had a lick of art history and I had maybe not enough, but that was my course. His career of twenty-five years at the Museum of Modern Art—with having one of the great art historians standing, I should say, out in front of him, in the person of Alfred Barr—was certainly as flexible and interesting as we would all like our careers to be. The route to directorship is more complicated now. It's not only art historians. People can come in from architecture. In England, they often come from the world of painting, or a world of painting and teaching, that's very different from a museum world. We think we all get to places by more or less the same route, only it's either harder or easier, and that's not true. We get to where we are by a lot of different routes and, as far as I'm concerned, the more routes the better, which is not to say that training in art history is not hugely important. One of the great issues today—maybe less than ten years ago, but it's still a real challenge—is the shying away from object-based education in university art-history departments, wherever they may be—that long influence, whether it's French, whether it's English, or whether it's American, of the “new art history.” Wherever it's coming from now, it's still there, and that's one reason why you're casting your nets for new young people to come into

curatorial life in the museum, or into conservation life in the museum, or to education life in the museum. It's sometimes harder to find people because they've just spent five, seven, eight years of their lives doing art history without any reference to works of art at all.

Everyone in the room who is a curator or a director has a huge obligation to try to expand the exposure of people, who might end up working in museums, to objects and to what museums are all about. That comes back to the whole issue of audience and not wanting to second-guess any visitor who walks through the door, whatever age he or she may be, as to what will most interest them and what will not interest them at all. This is one of the great challenges, because it's the unexpected thing that strikes you—which is not a question of the temptation *into* the museum; maybe, in part, that will be the expected thing. You go because you want to see something that particularly connects to your own experience or that you think you're going to hate, so you really want to see it. But, on the way to see that particular work of art, you see something else that actually changes your life, and nobody is going to predict what that may be. So, I thought it very interesting, the whole issue of what you put where as the visitor makes his or her way, particularly in big places like ours where it takes a long time to get from one end of the museum to the other.

I'm also fascinated by the subject of the floating curator, like the floating world in Japan. Curators float a lot, even if they're connected. Theoretically, we've got them rooted in the institution, but floating and moving around the world is terribly important. If they're not attached to an institution at all, that also can be great, because they come zipping into the institution and see it in a way that you've never seen it before. On the other hand, they get out quickly before they're in trouble. The other thing I worry about is this issue, which I've again found in the quote from Pontus Hulten, about permanent collections as energy sources. They certainly should be energy sources for people coming in, coming in from outer space, as they often do, but the real issue for anybody who is a curator in a museum that has a collection is the question of their interest or lack of interest in the place. And by place, I don't mean only the museum but the bigger context—the city, the culture.

There's a bunch of other things I'd love to talk about, but, finally, one of the things that is fascinating—and, again, it's not new—is that museums have always been involved in the history of their cities. That is very interesting to me. If you look at the general population of Minneapolis, you can bet that the Walker's consistent contemporary programming over fifty years has affected what some of those people are like and what they like and what they don't like. You're looking skeptical, but I bet it's true. We'll devise a survey—God help us! Take the museum, or cities where museums are free, as opposed to where you have a big fee to

enter. The degree to which people feel free to wander in and out of a museum for a repeat visit—I can't believe that that doesn't make a difference. Because this is a big challenge for curators. I think it was true—but everytime I say something like that, I rush to deny it myself—that thirty years ago or forty years ago, the curator was much less involved, *needed* to be less involved and *was* less involved, in a lot of things that interact with the larger community, whether it was fund-raising, whether it was talking to city planners and people who were thinking about the city in which they live in a very different way, even perhaps talking with the media. The media have changed enormously since that time. Whether the curators then were having real conversations, as we are now, with donors, or with schools and universities, or with critics, it's a very different kind of conversation than went on thirty or forty years ago. I'm going that far back because we have to get it back before most of the people in this room can remember. Certainly, directors have to do that public interaction all the time. One of the pleasures and one of the agonies of being a director is that there's just not enough time to go around; it takes a huge amount of time connecting with all kinds of wonderful aspects of your community, both in the large sense and, often, in very specific smaller senses, in which your museum exists. I'm sure it's true of New York, even though everybody thinks New York doesn't have communities. It has a lot of communities. As does London or much, much smaller cities.

One of the questions for curators is, how can they be somewhat involved in some of those conversations and still have time to do what they do? Having loved so much being a curator and having loved so much spending a lot of time with art and with artists, the idea of asking somebody who is doing that now to spend less time than I did with art and artists, because they have to spend more time with other aspects of museum life, is tough, but it has to happen. Directors have to make it easier for curators to do this, make it less time-consuming, and, at the same time, we have to protect the curator's time to do what they must do—otherwise, the whole museum falls apart—which is to focus on art. That's the crucial thing, and each of us has said it in a different way. It's "to be with art is what we ask." Well, it's not necessarily all we ask, but it's what we want for everybody who comes through the museum door. If art isn't the central issue for all of us, we're dead.

**Robert Storr:** I'd love to see that engraved on the cornice of the building.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

**Robert Storr:** I want to ask a few questions to open up conversation here, but I will turn it over to the floor quickly. It won't be as long an exchange as it was for the first round.

One thing I wanted to ask, or sort of throw out, is that the role of the curator, in many cases, is to be what Gertrude Stein called the village explainer—to be the person who tries to make sense of what they do to a variety of constituencies within the museum and outside the domain of museum directors. They have to explain to a different group of people. They have to explain to city governments, if, in fact, as in Philadelphia or London or wherever, there are state interests or city interests, or what have you, involved. They have to explain to trustees, which is the most tender issue, but also the most important, in many ways, not only what it is that they're doing, in general, but what it is that is being done in a particular moment when changes and challenges and reinventions are taking place. I wondered if anyone wants to jump into that heavily mined territory and talk a little bit about how you interpret the overall function and the particular work being done by the curators that you, in a sense, curate.

**Kathy Halbreich:** What worries me a little about conversations such as this is that we set up whole hosts of false dichotomies. We set up a dichotomy that says our central focus is art, and I think our central focus is bifocal. But let's be clear about that. We set up dichotomies between trustees and directors and curators, when, in fact, the healthiest organizations are organic. If directors only spoke to trustees, institutions would be boring places—not because the trustees are boring, but because the conversations need to be multiple. I spend quite a bit of time, it's true, with trustees whom I really like, and I guess it's okay to say that, but I also spend time with high-school principals, I spend time with artists, I spend time with educators, I spend time with designers, I spend time with community activists, I spend time with bunches of people, because I need to take the temperature of where I live as well as the temperature of my institution. It's also because the only thing I have is my curiosity and integrity. Other than that, my days are spent with many people. If I let my curiosity go, it doesn't just take me to trustees.

What I worry about here is casting any one group as evil or as pure. I wonder whether disinterest is the only state or the best state. So, the question that came out to me this morning was this question of the ideal seems to be a disinterested stance in terms of the marketplace, and, yet, I wonder if that's really possible or if it's useful. On the other hand, I'm quite old-fashioned, Anne, in the sense that I don't yet allow corporate logos on the walls of the museum; when people come to the museum, or the art center, and see corporate logos, they're

confused about what's in the gallery and why. It muddies the good part of the disinterest to have those logos up there. Actually, we're trading in visual symbols all the time.

**Ned Rifkin:** How does it muddy it? I don't quite understand what you mean by that?

**K.H.:** Exhibitions aren't advertisements.

**N.R.:** No.

**K.H.:** Once you put a corporate logo on the wall, it's saying, this is endorsed, sanctioned—this is an advertisement for that company.

**N.R.:** So, the name and graphics would be better than . . .

**K.H.:** Yes, it seems to be once removed.

**N.R.:** We've had this conversation.

**K.H.:** I know this is subtle—maybe it doesn't make any sense—and I certainly would enjoy hearing about it.

**N.R.:** What if it's a good logo, well designed?

**K.H.:** I don't know. Like what I was trying to say earlier to Roberta, and I don't think I said it very well, is that—and we might as well get into it, because this is what caused the greatest heat this morning—the role that money plays in our institutions is very complicated. There is a necessity to be very clear with our audiences about how we're supported and who supports us and, perhaps, even why. I'm not really confused by the Armani problem. It is wrong for an institution to do an exhibition on an artist, however broad that definition is, and then accept multiples of millions of dollars from that artist from another hand. It's just too confusing and it's wrong. But that's easy. That's the easiest way to suggest to our publics that commerce has entered the temple. I don't think it's all bad, but I don't yet know exactly where the lines are, and I think it's healthy to talk about it publicly.

**Anne d'Harnoncourt:** It's very healthy. One thing that also complicates it is that the line may be somewhere slightly different in different cases. This always makes everybody uncomfortable, because they love to have (and I'm part of the "they")

a single rule that made a lot of sense—there it was. Maybe the only rule—and maybe that’s the least possible rule—is transparency, because with transparency, at least, you know where you are. But, if you look back at the history of exhibitions and who has or hasn’t sponsored them, there’s almost always somebody who’s crazy about an artist’s work and owns two or three or more of their things. So, if you can’t get a corporate sponsor, you say, please, we’ve got to do a show of X and we know you love X, won’t you help us? It’s a tricky situation, and that may be an extreme case, but there are all kinds of gradations of that. Does it make it less problematic if the value is not very high? For instance, if somebody is a passionate collector of a certain kind of thing that doesn’t have a big monetary value, but they think they’re just extraordinary and they know a huge amount about them, and they give you money to do that exhibition? The transparency issue is one aspect of how one might answer that.

I hear your statement about the Armani show and the millions of dollars, but what if it were an artist, and that artist gave you millions of dollars of their works of art after the exhibition? At the moment, they don’t get a tax deduction for that, but that’s kind of a crime.

**N.R.:** The Menil has a Cy Twombly gallery, and he’s the major patron in donating works of art, by comparison to anyone else. He’s probably our second largest patron. I say that aloud, but that’s not a bad thing, if you see the result. It’s perfectly wonderful.

**A.d’H.:** As long as you’re saying, I’d love a Twombly gallery and not an X gallery.

**N.R.:** That’s right.

**A.d’H.:** Mr. X or Ms. X can’t make you take X things because they’re giving you X dollars.

**N.R.:** Right.

**Nicholas Serota:** But it comes back to a question of the sequence of these things . . .

**N.R.:** Yes, sure.

**N.S.:** . . . and also, ultimately, the responsibility of both curators and directors for drawing attention to their boards of trustees or their governing bodies to the issues at stake. The Tate is in the rather fortunate position of having a board of trustees that is composed in a rather different way from most American boards, in

that they're all appointed by the Prime Minister. Three of them are, by statute, artists. It might be thought that there was a conflict of interest, but, in my experience, the presence of the artists on the board is a very, very powerful force that ensures that some of these positions of conflict are exposed and discussed.

**R.S.:** Could you say a little more about that? That doesn't exist in America, and it is perceived as possibly a conflict of interest, although I think Chuck Close, now, is on some kind of advisory commission at the Whitney.

**A.d'H.:** He's a trustee, I think.

**R.S.:** Is he actually a trustee now?

**A.d'H.:** I think so.

**R.S.:** But this is a new thing, and I wondered if you could say a little bit about how it does work, and what the nature of the contribution is, and the limits of the tenure.

**N.S.:** In my experience, it seems to work best when the artist concerned is between the age of, roughly, thirty-five and fifty-five, fifty. That is to say, they are artists of some standing but not canonized as yet, or, at least, not in the eyes of other trustees. What that provides is an authentic voice for artists, but also a view of what is happening both from the younger generation and from an older generation, which is not yet so powerful as to intimidate the "lay" trustees from expressing a view. There were times in the past—for instance, when Tony Caro became a trustee rather late—when he expressed a view, everyone followed his lead and said, well, if Tony thinks it's not a great Picasso, then we couldn't possibly have it.

Artist-trustees have played a big part in helping to shape Tate Modern. Artists were closely involved in the selection of architect and, indeed, in the development of the design. Artists also play a role in guiding the educational, and, to some extent, even the moral purpose of the institution. I wouldn't go so far as to say they're the moral conscience, but they, undoubtedly, will remind some of the trustees who come from other worlds, including corporate finance and, that the rules in our world are not necessarily the same in theirs.

**R.S.:** Since the marketing issue is still there a little bit, and since you raised it and it's connected to the other issue of fund-raising and so on, there's a body of criticism that speaks about museums almost offhandedly as part of the culture

industry. There's also the tendency of newspapers to list what we do in the "arts, leisure, and entertainment" sections. There's an overall perception that we are somehow driven by these marketing imperatives to the exclusion of almost everything else, or, if not to the exclusion of everything else, then in such ways that we are implicitly always compromised. I wondered how you view the actual predicament, and has it changed in recent years? And, two, how does one undo some of those perceptions in order to get to a place where, in a sense, transparency really is read as such?

**K.H.:** Some days, I think we have done this to ourselves by quoting statistics—more people go to cultural events than sports. So what?

**N.R.:** It's very misleading anyway.

**K.H.:** What does that mean? Do they have a different experience? Do they have the same experience? Do they have different food? How much time do they spend there? If you start to think—and I think about the language I use to sell my institution all the time—it's very easy to accept the corporate model as the appropriate model for a cultural institution. We should be well run, all those things, but I don't think we're corporations.

Getting back to Peter's earlier question, what's the difference between what we do and an entertainment center? We're asking people to consume something very different. It's still about consumption, on some level, but, I often say, is it possible, for instance, with the teenager—where we focus so much energy on increasing the teen's engagement with the Walker—what am I trying to do? It's the time of life when somebody is actually beginning to consume culture; that's part of what the teenager's life is about. Is it possible to, if not replace the sneaker, add something to the sneaker's appeal? If you think about what our institutions are supposed to be about—again, not the status quo—that's exactly what's going on in a sixteen-year-old's mind. How can I be subversive? What difference do I make? Who wants to listen to me anyway? These questions are not that different from those artists ask, so it's a natural link to make. We need to think of ourselves as civic organizations, not corporate ones. I say that, recognizing I'm in a really luxurious position. I have a huge endowment. I have a very supportive community, and, after nine and a half years, I have a board that really trusts me and a community that actually knows the things that I started out saying I wanted to do basically still exist, almost ten years later. So, it's very easy for me. On the other hand, I don't want to pretend. It's easy to say we shouldn't be corporate, and then it's harder to know whose money to take and not take. I know, for instance, that Bob Gober is going to be in the U.S. pavilion this summer,

representing the United States at the Venice Biennale. He decided not to have either of the sponsoring institutions, the Art Institute of Chicago or the Hirshhorn, seek corporate funding for the pavilion. I think that's terrific. He has made a portfolio, which he will ask individuals to acquire, of his works that will go toward the sponsorship. Now, it is possible that one of the ten people who will buy these portfolios is a corrupt and horrible person.

**N.R.:** Then there's pure corruption, a form of purity.

**K.H.:** I was trying to get away from dichotomy.

**N.R.:** That's why I brought it up. Someone once told me all money is dirty, whether it's corporate or otherwise. I'm a little troubled by that. Do you invest in the stock market? Is that a corrupt thing to do? I'd also like to make sure we don't get away from how we differentiate ourselves from the corporations and entertainment industries—and that is to slow people down, to get people into an opportunity to reflect in depth, in time. We talked about time this morning on the other panel, and that sense of enhanced absorption is what museums are about. If corporations are willing to sponsor that, then I say great. But who sets the agenda is the key, and what they're buying and what you're trading is the question. How many parties does it take to make it . . .

**K.H.:** Does the public know who set the agenda?

**N.R.:** If you tell them.

**K.H.:** You tell them, read this along with the corporate logo.

**N.R.:** The corporate logo, yes.

**K.H.:** We say, by the way, the curator came to the director first, and then we found a corporation.

**N.R.:** My only objection to your logo thing is, a logo is much more succinct than writing it out. It's the same information as far as I'm concerned.

**A.d'H.:** I totally agree that museums are not corporations. They are civic organizations. The reason my emphasis on the art side of things was not to the disadvantage of the audience side is that the audience that we attract is an audience for art. That's what I really meant—not an audience for something else. I'm using

art in a very broad sense to include all the arts that each of us may show. The worry of having a corporate sponsor could easily be extended to each individual that might fund an exhibition or the museum as a whole, to the board of trustees, to some—the Tate has this in part—that are funded directly through the treasury of the country. That happens in England and it still happens in France. Unless you disagree violently with the policy of the country on a particular issue, which you could well do, depending on the country, that money is, at least, coming through so many sources that it's kind of purified, to some degree. It does depend on whether the corporation has such a very clear agenda, in terms of sponsoring something, that you really do worry. One example would be Philip Morris sponsoring an exhibition going to China, where so many people still smoke. That worries people in a very specific way.

**K.H.:** What do you do in that situation, though?

**A.d'H.:** I have no idea what I would have done; that's not a situation I've yet faced in that way. Artists certainly have made the decision, as in the case of Bob Gober, that they don't want to be supported by any corporation.

**K.H.:** Adrian Piper at MOCA faced this issue, didn't she?

**A.d'H.:** You examine it with each individual corporation and you could have a different effect, but the same is true to a considerable degree for individuals. It's the responsibility of each institution to look at the situation very carefully and try to make the best decision it can, rather than to have an absolute rule. It's certainly easier to do if you can afford to do it, rather than if you can't. That, of course, is hard as well; it puts the greatest pressure on the places with the least resources.

**N.R.:** That's a good point.

**N.S.:** It puts, obviously, a huge pressure on institutions to make the blockbuster show, to take the corporate money, to squeeze the contemporary art to the margin, and, essentially, not to deal with the more difficult kinds of exhibitions and the more problematic ones. Tate is in a fortunate position of, as you say, receiving government money—rather less in proportion to our overall expenditure, which was the case ten years ago, and much less than we would wish, but we do get public money—and that money is there and is used very much to support the contemporary parts of the program. But, as that money diminishes, there's a tendency, obviously, for us to find ourselves doing more and more shows of a certain kind. That can knock in with other pressures to do with corporate giving,

large admission numbers, membership, all these other factors. How do we resist?

**K.H.:** How do you buffer your institution from these kinds of pressures?

**N.S.:** We buffer by setting a frame for each year, and saying we will only do one show of that kind, however difficult that may be. We could fill a whole program with those shows every year.

**K.H.:** Which show of which kind?

**N.S.:** The blockbuster.

**K.H.:** Okay.

**R.S.:** Can I ask another question about the art part, but on the collecting side? There have been moments in American museums where almost any city you went to—thanks, in part, to very skillful dealers—who should not be sneered at, because they truly were skillful dealers, had pretty much the same list of artists. The factors around that had to do with the genuine interest in these artists. It had to do with passions of collectors. It had to do, again, with the industry of the people selling this art. But, now, it's increasingly apparent that the range of things that we're confronting is such that we can't do this any longer. Museums, for instance, buying the Beuys acquisition, it's a specialized decision. There are things I would dearly love, but I can't buy them even though they fit perfectly into some history of art that we've already developed to a certain point. How do you, in a directorial position, manage the priorities that curators bring to you, assuming that the curators are the ones who make many, if not most, of the selections and encourage the particular choices?

**N.R.:** It's different in each museum, though.

**R.S.:** I assume so; that's why I was asking.

**N.R.:** The Menil is going to continue to collect according to a certain—what should I call it?—the collection already sets the tone. We're probably not going to collect in prehistoric and tribal arts anymore; in the area of contemporary art, certainly we will, but it's going to be within the sphere of how we begin to define that. Other museums I've worked in have different parameters, but my experience, both as a curator and as a director, is that there's always a collaborative dialogue, and that dialogue is a refining dialogue that, ultimately, defines

those parameters. I don't know how else to say it. It's different in each place.

**K.H.:** We have a mission. Under the mission, we have a section that deals with the collection and where it's long-term focus should be. Then, beyond that, each year, we have an acquisition plan that leaves ample room for serendipity, but has very targeted research goals as well as acquisition goals—and that's one area that I haven't delegated. I am in there with the curators, although it's clear that there is work that I don't see that is very important to them, that should be acquired. In the same sense, there's work I don't like that is very important for us to collect, because nobody dies when you make a certain acquisition. It means that the collection sings with many voices and, ultimately, that's what we are talking about today as well. I don't think there's a science to it, but it's one of the major things we do, because people perceive it to be that way, too. We're saying an exhibition is up for three months, the catalog stays in our basement for nineteen years, yet the collection is supposed to be forever, on some level. It requires a different kind of time than other decisions, longer time.

**N.S.:** We will have to train ourselves and our trustees and our audiences to recognize that museums are going to have to become more particular. Even the supposed encyclopedic museums, such as the Museum of Modern Art, in New York, or even the Tate or Pompidou, can no longer and, indeed, should no longer pretend that they are trying to collect across the whole range. They will need to focus. Then, they will need to collaborate with others in exchanging works that will, otherwise, spend fifty percent, and more often ninety percent of their lives in storage.

**K.H.:** By the way, this year we bought a work of art with another museum. We bought the last Matthew Barney *Cremaster* installation that he made, which we helped commission. It took up 2,500 square feet of gallery space. It dawned on us that it was ridiculous, even if we could have afforded to own it all ourselves, because, again, the public doesn't give a rip whether the Walker owns it or SFMOMA owns it. Now, the piece is owned by SFMOMA and the Walker, and increasingly . . .

**N.S.:** We've done that.

**K.H.:** It wasn't a big issue in our institution, but I could see it being a big issue, like authorship, ownership, or even atomizing notions of ownership—and that's healthy.

**N.R.:** Which brings up the whole subject of collaboration, which we haven't even gotten into yet, and the co-organization, but, now, also moving into collection management. It's going to be much more complicated in the future if this model takes.

**K.H.:** We are like dinosaurs when it comes to partnership. If you look, again, at the Internet as a potential model for a lot of different ways of operating, or you look at corporations—and it blows my mind that the major car companies now have a website where they're buying their materials collectively—this is a major change in the behavior of corporations. We have not gotten to that point progressively. We're still very territorial, usually, even those of us who are friends.

**A.d'H.:** One more note on acquisitions. It's much more appropriate to some museums and cities than others to try to think, where possible, across the city as a whole, with a view to opportunities that arise and a view to gaps. It's not only the issue of lending, perhaps, whole chunks of collections that are in one place that have a great many of certain kinds of work and could make do with a smaller group—and we've certainly begun to do that a fair amount, and so have other institutions. But, also, not to jump squarely into the great strength of another institution in town, such as the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, which we're sitting in. It has fabulous long suits in some areas and short suits in others, as does the Philadelphia Museum, and vice versa. The contemporary issue for us is harder, simply because we have eight competing departments of very different natures, of very different strengths. Yet, it's the way the whole comes together. I may be idiotic enough to still think that we can be read, to some degree, as a whole or, at least at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, as having great strengths in various areas. For example, Thomas Eakins over here and Marcel Duchamp over there have a lot to say to each other—and, indeed, there are some artists in Philadelphia who are, clearly, very affected by their encounters with both of those artists. So, there we probably have to pick and choose and jump on serendipity even more than the rest of you, partly because of limited funds and partly because of the great range of opportunities we should be able to take advantage of.

**R.S.:** I have one last question, and I'll open it to the floor. In the eighties phase of the culture war in this country, there was a lot of discussion and a lot of unhappiness about the fact that the large institutions did not go to the defense of the smaller institutions who were, in fact, showing the controversial, difficult art that the large institutions started to buy ten years later. In the most recent incident, which was in Brooklyn, the large institutions—and some small ones, and some

that weren't even art museums but were science museums, and so on—did, in fact, rally around. It took days for people to discuss this, because their vulnerabilities were all very different. Nonetheless, they did rally to the defense of that show, despite the fact that many of the people involved had dissatisfaction with the show, but the principle of free expression was something they understood. Could you say anything about how you see the big institutions in that kind of specifically political defense, where the small institutions don't get rolled under.

**N.R.:** In general, part of the director's role, but also the curator's in that kind of partnership, is—the word hasn't been used—advocacy. It is not just educating people but advocating for certain moral, aesthetic, and even social, and, sometimes, political perspectives. As community leaders, it's embedded in our roles, and it has to happen. If it doesn't happen, then no one shows up, as you've indicated before. I'm a smaller institution—I'm sort of third tier, as it were, in Houston—but the role is just as important. Whether they want to hear it or not, you have a moral obligation.

**N.S.:** I have no doubt at all that the success of Tate Modern has given Tate as a whole a slightly more powerful voice within the body politic. We will need to use this voice to defend, to support, and to sustain smaller institutions, not just in London but around the country.

**R.S.:** Okay—doke, I've said my piece. They have more to say. Please.

**K.H.:** Some big institutions did get in trouble during the cultural wars.

**R.S.:** Oh, yes, I know, I know.

**K.H.:** And are still lonely.

**R.S.:** I know.

## AUDIENCE QUESTION AND ANSWER



**Nicholas Baume:** I'm from the Wadsworth Atheneum, which is actually a museum so old that they didn't have the word when it was inaugurated. Last year, we changed our name to the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art because nobody, the theory goes, knows what an atheneum is. It was interesting to find, in Kathy's presentation, an idea of the museum as an integrated cul-

tural experience that combines these different art forms in ways that, perhaps, are truer to the way that artists think and realize them, that actually harks back to the model of an atheneum that contains spaces for the exhibition of works of art, for the preservation of history, for libraries, for performance, for readings. Maybe this is another motif that, in looking back at our history, we've rediscovered—models for practice that we now think of, or, perhaps, already cast, as innovative.

Against that, I'm particularly interested in bringing that back to the question of the role of the curator and to think about a couple of the comments that were made. Nick, for instance, was saying that the reading of the curator should be foremost, but, at the same time, that that reading needs to be most closely informed by a dialogue with the artist. I'm not sure. Maybe the details of that comparison are something you could elaborate on further. It reminded me, in another way, of a comment this morning that Rob made that also was critical of the idea of the auteur curator—but, at the same time, insisted on the need of the curator to control everything in terms of the projection of exhibitions. And to do that in a context where, at the same time, we're recognizing that the museum is changing, in a way becoming more specialized, as Nick said, but also becoming more integrated, as Kathy's model showed, and, in doing so, recognizing the importance of other professionals and colleagues who can contribute in ways that we as curators can't. My question is about how this new model, which may also relate to older models, implicates for questions of curatorial practice.

**Kathy Halbreich:** I didn't agree with what Rob said, in the sense that the curator controls it all. For instance, I don't think the curator, necessarily, is trained in graphic design. We have a design studio, and the designers work closely with the curators and the artists. It's kind of hackneyed, but it requires teams of people who are mutually respectful rather than a hierarchy of points of view. It's possible even to do an exhibition that's based on the audience's frame of reference—maybe not everyone—but it's certainly possible to do that, and it should be done.

Rather than the professionally trained curator, you invite people who aren't professionally trained to make some of the decisions, to shape some of the questions, and even to tell us what's good.

**Anne d'Harnoncourt:** I also think the issue of signing labels is a fascinating one. Not to go on at great length, but some of the best labels—and I'm a very biased reader—I've ever read were essentially the result of three perspectives: a conservator, a curator, an educator. They don't sound like three people; they give you a terrific kind of buzz about the object you're looking at.

Museums always struggle with the whole situation of the star problem, the star curator doing this or that or the other. Maybe the curators don't mostly feel like stars, they feel like underpaid drudges, and I certainly understand that side of life; on the other hand, if you sign all the labels in the museum, that means a huge fight as to how many names are going to be on that label. It also could mean that there are a lot of voices that are, oddly enough, suppressed by that process.

**Ned Rifkin:** Wouldn't it be amazing if you had opposing points of view on a label?

**Dave Hickey:** I have a real specific question that I would like an answer to. What is the position of your institutions on anonymous donations? The reason I ask this, if any are anonymous, all could be anonymous, and we would be saved the fantasy that announcing donations is not advertising. I don't know a museum that doesn't accept anonymous donations. What I'm saying is, the alternative to total transparency might be ethical opacity. I'd be interested to know the position of your museums on anonymous donations, and if you take both anonymous and announced donations.

**K.H.:** We take both, but we will not take anonymous donations to exhibitions from somebody whose work is in that exhibition.

**A.d'H.:** We certainly take both, and I don't think we do what Kathy doesn't do, but I'd love to be sure. I'd like to be just as pure as Kathy, but my memory is not as good; but I don't think so.

**K.H.:** It just came up; that's why I know it.

**A.d'H.:** There are also, certainly, issues of gifts of works of art, as well as gifts of funds to purchase works of art, as well as gifts for exhibitions. In each category, the question might be slightly different, and people's reasons for anonymity are different. Whether a corporation would ever give anything anonymously is a question.

**N.R.:** Yea, right.

**A.d'H.:** But some might.

**N.R.:** I don't think it's a question.

**K.H.:** I don't think it is.

**A.d'H.:** Oh, sure.

**N.R.:** Yea?

**A.d'H.:** Sure.

**N.R.:** I don't know the answer, Dave, in the case of the Menil. I don't think it's ever come up other than on a work of art. The one thing I will tell you is that I asked, when the work of art was given anonymously, didn't we need to know who it was? We weren't even being told who it was ourselves, as opposed to the public display of that credit.

**N.S.:** We basically have a rule that it can be anonymous, but it cannot be anonymous from the board.

**Peter Plagens:** It would seem commonsensical that if money were given by corporations, and there were a hundred museums in the city, and there were Joe's museum and Fred's museum and so forth, it wouldn't carry quite the kind of gravity that it does; even if you aren't a monopoly in your given city, you have a kind of imprimatur—the *Philadelphia* Museum of Art, and Walker is, in effect, the *Minneapolis* Museum of Modern Art, etc.

One issue that hasn't been talked about, if you can touch on it lightly, is the business of how the elephant turns around without leaving footprints. In other words, in everything you do, you make art history and you give an imprimatur to things. Every time you have a group show, every time you have that town square, no matter how diverse and temporary you make it, there is a stamping of importance, which is one of the reasons why the corporate funding gets so heavy. Could you talk just a little bit about the business that every time you move, you make art history, rather than just record it and house it and show it?

**A.d'H.:** That's why it's great that there are lots of museums, because there's lots of variety of art history being made, if that's the question.

How does an elephant turn around without leaving any footprints? Either very carefully or it gets a balloon to lift it up; I don't know. Obviously, what institutions do makes a difference, and each of us tries in our own way to make that difference be a productive one. There will be minefields; each decision you make could have difficult repercussions. You try to see as many repercussions as you can, and then do the most positive thing for the mission of your institution, under the circumstances.

That's a mealy-mouthed answer, but every institution has a particular kind of power, and, no matter how small, if it does what it does really well, that institution is, clearly, going to be something that people watch—for exactly how it does it and what money it accepts and all kinds of things. I don't think it's a question that only pertains to the big ones, but the big ones have to pay a price for their visibility, which is a good price.

**N.S.:** It's a very beautiful object, but there's nothing worse than an elephant that is asleep in its field, and an elephant, Peter, that is asleep doesn't leave footprints. And so, as Anne says, you have to move with care, and you have to be aware of what you're doing. You need to make sure you don't stand on and crush too many other people. We need to move with care. But if you don't move, you are, by definition, asleep or dead.

**K.H.:** This probably is characterological, maybe it's gender-related; I don't know. I don't think about my life like that every day, or the lives of the people I work with every day. I don't think about us making history. I've tried to think of us making meaning. What institutions are, primarily, is a congregation of individuals with very, I hope, diverse passions. My job, in a funny way, is, again, to make sure that all of those passions have a place, but that there's some overall eccentric balance in it. I know I'm getting old and I'm getting fat, but I don't think of myself as an elephant yet. If you think about your footprints, as Nick says, you become slow.

**N.S.:** Peter, the other thing is, there are lots of elephants that move without making history.

**PP:** But you know it makes a difference . . . [INAUDIBLE] . . . if the Philadelphia Museum of Art shows an artist rather than X institution, there's something that has to be relative to the perception of that artist contemporaneously in our history, etc., etc., etc., and it can't be helped. I don't think there's any harm in being constructively self-conscious. I was asking what you do about it, not trying to indicate what you should do.

**A.d'H.:** You do what you believe in, with due consideration. You just keep moving, and you hope you've made terrific decisions.

**N.S.:** Peter, let me go back to when I was talking about moving and not standing on other people. For an institution like the Tate, which sits in a city where there are a number of other institutions also concerned with contemporary art, it is a matter of concern for us that we shouldn't take all the opportunities. I can remember a time when I was at the Whitechapel and there were moments I wanted to do a show and was told, "Oh, Tate is going to do a show." Indeed, I even remember an occasion when there was a show that was committed to the Whitechapel, which was then canceled by the artist in the belief that the Tate was about to offer him an exhibition. I never was quite sure whether I was pleased or sorry that the show never took place. We need to be careful and thoughtful about not taking opportunities for ourselves that can be better discharged by others.

**K.H.:** Here's the other thing, too. I've always been surprised that big institutions are so lumbering, because, in a certain sense, we're so much better protected than the smaller institutions that we should use that responsibility to be less safe, to be more searching, to be less blockbuster-oriented. I hope I haven't suggested a kind of purity, because I thought I indicated I was very confused about a lot of this, but I do think that, as a big institution, I can and must be more experimental, more inclusive, do better research, and all those things. On the other hand, I also believe—having been through major controversies in the culture wars when, finally, all I could say was look, nobody's got a gun here—we're talking about values. This is very dangerous to people. But we should be dangerous sometimes.



**Danielle Rice:** I'm curator of education at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. I want to shift the discussion a little more in this area of public responsibility. To me, as director of an education department, one of the biggest challenges that we face is, who gets to represent the voice of the public within the institution? It's probably one of the main causes of tension within most museums—that any number of different departments feel that they represent the public the best. Inevitably, all of us who work in museums probably take ourselves as the primary audience—curators do that, but educators do that as well—and one of the biggest challenges today is not to do that. I would like to hear some solutions to this problem of inner tensions within the institution: Who gets to be the one who says, this is the public for this particular exhibition, this is the public that we speak to, and here is what they look like?

**N.R.:** The first way to do that is to find out who they are when they're there. The question that's more difficult is, who are the people who are not there, and how do you find out how to represent the potential audience that isn't now coming to an institution? I don't know how to do that, quite honestly, except from demographic studies of who is there, and then making an effort to engage the audiences who aren't there through various strategies.

**K.H.:** But isn't your question about internal politics and conversation, too?

**D.R.:** Yes, it was. Ours is a large institution. One of the things that's happened in recent years, it seems to me, is that curatorial departments have largely stayed the same while other branches of the museum, which supposedly represent the public, have expanded. For instance, the curatorial staff is very much the same in the Philadelphia Museum of Art as it was fifteen years ago when I started working there, but we have entire departments that didn't exist: visitor's services, marketing, and P.R. Development is way larger than it was—education has grown spectacularly in this time, too—and each one of these departments feels that they represent the public.

**K.H.:** Oh, I think they do. The trick is to get all of the "theys" focused on the mission.

This is a simple way of explaining it. When I got to the Walker, there used to be curatorial meetings. Actually, that meant only the visual arts curator, because the head of performing arts was called the director and the head of film-video was called the director. I went to them and said, you guys do the same things that the guys over there do; could we change the title to curator? Yes. Then, we had curators' meetings, where all the curatorial departments were represented. I looked around after a while and realized there were huge numbers of other people with expertise who weren't at the table. Now, we have program meetings, and educators are there and P.R. people are there and, occasionally, development. They don't come that much. But that's okay; you're meeting people to death, too. I always thought it was odd that public relations and audience development—that's the name of that department—didn't talk to education when, in fact, they're involved in the same thing, from different areas of expertise.

So, that's what we do. When we look at an exhibition or when we look at a program in performing arts, we're trying to find crossovers among all the curatorial departments, but we're also trying to find a strategy. We have a program sheet; after the curator presents the exhibition, we try and figure out who the audiences are and how we can reach them. Sometimes, that means reaching them through films, or through marketing, or through lots of different ways. We have

to break the silos down internally. You must be doing something like that, too.

**Robert Storr:** Roberta wanted to ask something.

**Roberta Smith:** I'm going to take the conversation back again to Peter's comment. What you're saying presupposes a kind of institutional infallibility about how every time a museum moves, it makes history.

**K.H.:** No, I was saying I didn't believe that that's what we were doing.

**R.Sm.:** Okay, fine.

**K.H.:** I asked Peter if he was sure that's what we were doing.

**R.Sm.:** I mean, it's—okay.

**K.H.:** I, personally, don't think that's what we're doing, but that's what I tried to say. I don't know what you were trying to say.

**R.S.:** There's good history and bad history. I wondered if any of the curators who spoke this morning have things they would like to bring to the discussion now. Paul?

**Paul Schimmel:** I'd like to make a comment about corporate support for contemporary art. From my standpoint, there just isn't enough of it. We're running around trying to get corporations on a regular basis to support our exhibitions, and on a regular basis they say no. There are times when corporations come to us with their ideas, and we probably say no more often than they say it to us. But I have a question for all of you. MOCA has a policy where we don't show private collections unless the collector has made a very significant gift to the museum of works from that collection that we're going to show. There's no hard-and-fast rule, but it has to be significant. I'm wondering what your institutional policies are with regard to showing private collections.

**N.R.:** I can tell you from my previous jobs—no, no, no, not the Menil, but in Atlanta—the institution requires a major gift from that collector, from that collection that's being shown, in advance of any kind of commitment on the institution's part. I don't think it's even relevant to the Menil, unfortunately, as a lot of this isn't.

**K.H.:** It might be some day.

**N.R.:** It might be some day, yes, but not for the moment.

**N.S.:** We have a simple policy, which is not to show private collections unless they are already committed to the Tate.

**K.H.:** All of it?

**N.S.:** No, not all of it.

**K.H.:** How much of it?

**R.S.:** The Modern's policy is that it has to be a preponderance of it. It's not just one token great thing and then you show dozens of others. The gift has to be the heart of the private collection.

**A.d'H.:** Our policy has been the same, either to have a commitment of the entire collection or some significant group of things. I'll just say, interestingly, that, to some extent—and very sadly and, maybe, just as well, but maybe also not—the policy, which makes a great deal of sense to me, has therefore meant that the public did not see some absolutely staggering private collections—like Bill Copley's collection, for instance, of which the only record is an auction catalog. The same could be said to be true for a couple of others. The very reason that museums don't show private collections is because they're afraid of being accused of increasing the value of something, which is certainly a risk and can happen.

I don't know how many of you knew Bill Copley or his collection, but it was one of the most extraordinary collections of surrealist art anywhere in the world. He was an artist who collected his works by running a gallery in Los Angeles and showing such surrealists as Magritte. Nobody bought anything, so he ended up with them all. He decided to change his life altogether after a divorce, and he sold it all. I still regret that no museum did a show of it.

**R.S.:** I remember seeing a show at Sotheby's when they put it up. It was amazing.

**N.S.:** Even so, this is not quite as hard-and-fast as we're suggesting, because all these institutions will take loans of single objects from private collections. Our rule is, simply, that we will not showcase a private collection.

**R.S.:** We have a rule that we don't show in collection galleries things on loan. I remember when Leo Castelli offered us a Roy Lichtenstein painting, we said thank you very much, but we cannot do this because we cannot break that line.

**K.H.:** We don't have a policy. We've had a lot of discussion about it. If I look back at the history of the Walker, there have been exhibitions of private collections that I'm sure were sterling exhibitions, and I'm not sure that any gift was left behind. One of the things that's interesting to me about this conversation is, as I've talked to people outside of the art world and said, the museum world thinks that the smartest thing to do is not show a private collector's work unless they give you something, they think that's graft. We think it's absolutely pure, and people outside the art world say, you mean it's okay because they give it to you; they pay you. This is why I say to you that I'm really confused about this. I try to think of myself as an ethical person, but it's confusing. I don't think it's as simple as I wish it were.

**R.S.:** But, in those cases, proportions do matter; it's not a token gift, it is a real donation, and it makes a lot of difference.

**K.H.:** I understand, because we're speaking the same language. But if you go down and ask the man on the street if it makes it any better . . .

**R.S.:** The statement isn't sufficient to the case, is all I'm saying. If you're talking about transparency, then you have to be transparent and say, this is a situation in which we would, this is a situation in which we wouldn't.

**K.H.:** We, by the way, have an exhibition up now that is called "The Cities Collect," drawn from sixty-two private collections in the Twin Cities. We did think about whether this was kosher to do. I thought, finally, it's ridiculous not to do it, not to have the curators out in the community meeting new people, engaging them in the conversation about the culture in which we live, why they bought things, when they bought them, how influential the various institutions were to their collecting habits—to encourage them and others to see this as a legal addiction. They could benefit all of us in the long term. If I'd been absolutely purist about it, I would have had to ask each of those sixty-two people to give me something before I could show the work. I will say, it's an exhibition that has made people quite proud of the place in which they live.

**D.H.:** I just had an observation vis-à-vis Peter's remark about the elephant. What we all have to recognize, especially when you're showing very young and unrecognized artists if you are a major institution, that the real elephant issue is about the elephant in the rose garden. The younger and less well known the artist you're showing is, the more catastrophic the financial effect, the market effect, of the work is. Large institutions, quite rightly, tend to be nervous about showing

very young artists, because you really do drive a train through a delicate garden when you start doing that.

**K.H.:** I'm not convinced that showing a young artist in Minneapolis drives that artist's career. I think it does if you show them at the Museum of Modern Art . . .

**N.S.:** To a degree.

**K.H.:** Yes, but it's not a stampede.

**D.H.:** For a very young artist, it is, though.

**R.S.:** But, nowadays, frankly—although there's undoubtedly an imprimatur that's given by a museum like the Modern—the truth of the fact is, in an awful lot of cases we're talking about, an entire show has been presold by a dealer, who's hyped it to such a point that nothing we could do would rival that in terms of trampling the garden.

**D.H.:** Because you were showing it.

**R.S.:** No, no, I'm saying before. Very often, these things are coming to shows after they've been dispersed to the world. It's the activity of the gallery that makes these people incredibly famous.

**D.H.:** Yea, right.

**R.S.:** No, really. You can't have it both ways. If we're always late, but then, also, too early, I'm not quite getting it.

**D.H.:** Better to be late, I think.

**R.S.:** Yea. Roberta?

**R.Sm.:** I need to ask my question about institutional infallibility again. Everyone makes so many mistakes, and you are ascribing this immense power of the institution to control everyone's faults. In a way, what you're saying is that art doesn't have that much power, and it's all being manipulated by the museum. I am taking the implications to the furthest degree.

**R.S.:** Can I just say you don't need to take it that far? Alfred Barr's rule of thumb

was that seven out of ten things bought by museum curators of his day were likely to not stand the test of time, or, at least, not stand in very high positions after a test of time. He was quite comfortable with that ratio, and he was, in fact, encouraging people to risk real failures in order that they get that thirty percent right. One of the things that's been interesting about these shows we've done recently—there are all kinds of problems within them, not all of them succeed—but one of the interesting things is, when you bring some of that stuff out, remarkably some of it freshens up, and even before we decided what was on the floor. For one particular exhibition, I brought up three times as much work as what we hung on the wall or installed on the floor. I wanted to see whether these things would look good or not, because you can't tell when you see them in the tills, or when you see them in horrible light, or whatever. Bring this thing back up to the floor and see if it can breathe. But it's precisely not about infallibility; it's about a high level of fallibility matched off against the chance to do something really significant by following the sort of iffy cases.

**D.H.:** There are real issues involved here. Museums can, quite literally, lose their imprimatur completely. I can remember being somewhere in New York and having a kid say, well, I just sold a piece to the Whitney, and to have his friend say, yea, well I have a Visa card. In other words, what I'm saying is, these are real issues. The imprimatur of the museum is important and does need to be maintained by some kind of public confirmation.

**R.S.:** Just in terms of the Modern, we have one other policy. We do not sell works by living artists unless it is to buy a superior work by that artist, and we try to avoid that as well. So that, as long as the artist is producing and alive and kicking, what we do in one choice should not then be retracted or revised in a way that's destructive.

**K.H.:** We are fallible. I've tried to say that in many, many ways, and I think it makes us stronger. But we have different degrees of power as institutions, and part of that is history, part of that is place, and part of that is the usual stuff that goes with talent.

**Terry Myers:** This conversation is leading me to the bigger issue—not in terms of museums or galleries but speaking as someone who has been teaching in art schools. One of the things that frustrates me the most about what's going on is this false notion of professionalism, and oh, my God, you cannot make a mistake. To be in a graduate student's studio is to feel this fear—that they have to lock themselves in place because all the other graduate students around them are

looking at what they're doing. Heaven forbid, they make something in their studio that literally or figuratively falls apart, that they make a mistake. If I walk in there and say, you should be screwing up every day, they look at me like I'm an idiot. But this is a bigger issue in terms of the whole system that we put into place.

**K.H.:** Museums play quite a small role in that. Maybe I'm wrong, but where most of the young folks are now looking is toward dealers and collectors.

**T.M.:** Kathy, it's very cool to show at the Walker, for instance, "Let's Entertain." For a young artist, the Walker probably now is better than MoMA. These things rise and fall. I worked at the Museum of Modern Art, I adore the Museum of Modern Art, but the fact is, these things are . . .

**K.H.:** It may be cool, but I still think that the driving force today for young artists—and I'm not sure it's good—is, as I said, the dealer and the collector.

**T.M.:** I agree, but I would put the museum slightly higher.

**N.R.:** Don't leave the teacher out of this. God knows, you're talking about students, and part of the problem is that nobody's really looked at the art school that hard yet. It's a real problem.

**R.S.:** I do a lot of visiting artist's gigs, and I taught painting for ten years. There are certain people who do the circuit and they, basically, teach career strategy. It's a huge problem. That is also subject to institutional critique, but it's a different institution. Our contribution to this problem is real, but it's nothing like the recently famous artist who collects a lot of paychecks going around telling other artists how to get famous, too.

**Catherine Lampert:** Just as dangerous as worrying about fallibility is the force of conformism. Museums, historically, if you look at their collections, are extremely conformist. The more you see other people's collections, the more it brainwashes. It's important that it's not just a question of having an orthodox collection and a little bit of regionalism but being really interested in a variety of things, not everything. I agree with Nick that a museum is unlikely to be good in every subject, but should be a little adventurous in picking some subjects that are not on your doorstep, and, equally, are not conformist. That's not happening often enough.

**N.R.:** That's a very fair comment. I agree with what you're saying. I would add to that the publication of books; catalogs are also one of the things that persuade us.

We look left and right, we do; someone once said they have a better ear than they have an eye. That's a very fair charge against museums, at least in this country.

**K.H.:** I think it is, too. Hans-Ulrich and I were talking about the Bruce Connor exhibition that Peter Boswell, who's here, did with Joan Rothfuss and Bruce Jenkins at the Walker. Traveling it was a bitch, because Connor is not a brand name—leaving aside the artist, who is difficult—but that wasn't really the issue. It was that people didn't know the artist that well. In Europe, it was absolutely impossible. We could not get it across the ocean.

**N.R.:** He's outside of the sphere.

**K.H.:** That's the other side of the issue of conformism that we also have to take into consideration. I hear the Connor show looks very beautiful at MOCA.

**R.S.:** Just a couple more questions; I sense people are wilting a bit. I don't want to hold you for too long, but I don't want to cut it short if there's somebody that urgently needs to say something—like way in the back. Is that Linda?

**Linda Norden:** This question picks up on something Thelma mentioned earlier, and Rob. Could we bring the conversation back to the curator, since we've had directors sort of dominating the conversation? Each of you have spoken of the curator as a uniform entity, as an abstract entity. Whatever attributes you've extended to the curator that you look for, it's not authorial. We talked about that in other guises. One of the things we haven't discussed, and it changes institution to institution, is the relationship between the curatorial responsibility and identity and the institutional identity. How is that relationship balanced, and to what extent is it institutional identity (what attracts contributions—corporate, donor, or otherwise), and to what extent is it the identifiable individual curator? That's complicated by the fact that somebody like you, Rob, has an independent curatorial identity as well as an institutional identity. What are your thoughts about the dynamic and the role that you think individual curatorial conceptions, or ideas for shows, or ideas for acquisitions—especially shows—plays in institutional identity?

**A.d'H.:** Can I take a first crack at that one? Certainly, I didn't—and I bet my colleagues didn't—either mean to give any sense that curators were all alike or that there was one kind of conception of them. You could always say they could be more different, but there are very different kinds of people coming from very different kinds of ways of looking and thinking about art—certainly in our museum, and I suspect in all of ours. I think that's terribly important. Curators,

certainly, as well as other people in the institution, but curators, over long ranges of time, give huge character to the collections they're responsible for building or the gifts that they attract. It's a little tough in the Philadelphia Museum, in one sense, because so many of the collections came intact—the Arensberg collection, the Gallatin collection, the Kienbusch collection of armor—so you could say that the curators have less effect. But, in fact, that isn't true, since they basically had a huge role in attracting those very collections, together with trustees or others with whom they made very strong alliances to support the museum. Just an example, not from contemporary art, but thinking of our late curator of Indian art, Stella Kramrisch, who was one of the most amazing people in any field in an American museum, and who really left her entire stamp on our collection, on our intellectual direction in that field. A young curator, Dale Mason, who is now in those small but powerful shoes, is contending not only with the great works of art but with this huge kind of persona, which I think is great. It can be problematic, however, because it's always tough to succeed somebody that's big and complex, but if that can happen, the more that happens, the better. It's very true today, just as it was during the formative years of the museum. The Philadelphia Museum of Art is a good example of the relative smallness of curatorial staff, which Danielle Rice mentioned earlier. We had curator-directors a long time ago. I'm not quite in that category because, I hope, the curators get the feeling they are independent, at least to the degree that I could make that possible. This is what makes museums less like cookie-cutter collections. It's like Sandberg in the Stedelijk; curators had a huge effect, and still have a huge effect on what museums are.

**N.R.:** I see the curatorial-directorial tango as a partnership, in a way, and that, probably more than the director, in most cases, the curators are the people who are most in touch with the art, whether it's historic or contemporary. The director's job is to enable the curator to do the work. All of us here have been curators; Kathy even opened up her presentation with a confession of how she misses being a curator. I would say the same thing. The reason I took the job I now have is to do more curatorial work, because I missed it. But the Menil is a slightly different institution. At larger institutions, the director's job is to enable that curator to do their work. If you've been a curator, you know what that means, and I would hope the best directors are still former curators.

**K.H.:** But it's changed a lot. I came to the Walker because Martin Friedman was a great museum director and it was a healthy organization, but he also was a curator. The board was looking for a director who could maintain her curatorial passions. Yet, it's a more complicated job now.

You were asking about identity, though, and I still don't know what "brand" means. I know we're supposed to have a brand, but I don't know what it is. I've been told by brand specialists that we should market the Walker, but I can't figure out what the organization is without its creative programs. By that, I also mean its connection to people. The curators are one very large part of the brand, but they're not the only creative people in the organization who make the brand. Educators do enormous work. Community program people do enormous work. So, curators are absolutely central, but I don't think they're the only central column.

**R.S.:** Can I say one thing? When I spoke earlier this morning, it was not to say curators were central to everything. I was talking about exhibition practice specifically, and that's a refinement. You may still disagree with me on that, but I'm certainly not talking about curators being seen in this role. On the contrary, I was trying to say they don't belong in such a position. They should be collegial, and they should know that in any given area someone else has much more expertise than they do. Deciding how to use that expertise, I believe, should come back to them ultimately.

**Adam Lerner:** I would ask that same question—but the reverse. And that is, what kind of role do you see for mentoring curators now that the museum is, in a sense, based on a university model, where faculty are fairly independent, in theory? But, in fact, universities are now seeing more importance in mentoring younger faculty. Today, we talked a lot about merging the visions of individuals with institutional visions. As curators, we do not arrive as fully formed elephants. What role do we play in mentoring young curators?

**K.H.:** You're sitting next to four extraordinary curators who were mentored at the Walker, so you should ask them.

**R.S.:** Do any of the curators who spoke this morning want to talk about that?

**Thelma Golden:** I'll give an answer to that, but also an answer to Linda's question, which I don't feel was answered. Maybe, in a certain way, I'm going to hit some generational divide here, but, the reality, in terms of Linda's question about the institutional identity vs. the curatorial identity, in this moment of the branding of the museum, is the reality that young curators do, whether by default or not, have to, in some way, understand themselves outside of the institutional identity. In the era of the five-year director contracts and so on, one's identity as a curator is not necessarily locked into what might have been an older model of curators, who come and stay for twenty years and are the institution. That is not

necessarily a conflict, except when the institution's needs for a brand often move it beyond being program-centered. When the whole branding conversation puts it away from the program, it does become an antagonistic thing. As for mentoring, however, I think it is crucial for the institution to do that, not just because it's the way in which a curator then forms their voice—which is, to me, a better way to put it than brand—I'm a little bit skeptical about the brand thing, too—but in terms of mentoring, it is the only way that a curator can find their voice within an institution or outside of it. Very specifically, my own career was formed completely through mentoring, both by the person I'm now working for as a director, Lowery Sims, whom I met as a high-school student, to the former director of the Whitney, David Ross, and many other people who are in this room. In terms of institutionally making that possible again, because of the structures of museums and the way curatorial hierarchies tend to work, it is not inherent in the day-to-day process, but it does happen by default. That is something we do have to become more conscious about, but it's harder to do it in an environment in which the notion of how even departments are structured changes and is very fluid.

**N.S.:** Increasingly, I see the institution as being very much more like a publishing house. I see it as providing shelter for curators who need to develop projects and need the kind of resources that we can bring to them. I don't see people necessarily making a commitment to the institution that will be a lifelong commitment, and I don't see them handing in their cards when they enter the institution and giving away their independence. The institutions of the future will be able to absorb and use different voices in the way that Kathy clearly does and other institutions represented in this room do. There should not be a house style and house curatorship.

**N.R.:** The other thing I'd like to say in relation to institutional identity—and it depends on the institution—we always say that as a disclaimer—is that the collection as it exists in most institutions, if they're collecting institutions, has more to do with the identity and the kind of curatorial magnetism that may exist for bringing somebody to that collection as well. This is supposed to be about exhibitions. Exhibition programs do a lot more today than they once did in defining institutional identity. For that reason—following up on what Nick and, more or less, what Kathy has said—you want a constellation of people, not necessarily stars but, rather, a grouping, a convergence, a variety of voices to reflect the range of possibilities. The subject of mentoring is very timely; I've heard from a lot of directors that the pool isn't as deep as it once was for upcoming curators. I hope that's not true, but I'm wading into it to find out. If you're out there and you're a

young curator, let me know. I'm interested in finding out about the next generation here.

**K.H.:** One of the things I've discovered recently is that some of the best young curators don't want to work in these big institutions. They want a different life. Actually, they want a life. I get incredibly resentful of this on some level, I confess, and they know it. But I also admire it, and that's part of the change we were talking about earlier today.

**A.d'H.:** Mentoring is not only vertical but horizontal. What should happen more is a shared responsibility among the people who have been in whatever museum, whatever size, for a bit longer, to connect with the people who are coming into it, whether they are curators, whether they are educators, whether they're conservators.

Just a little parenthesis that we have talked hardly at all about is the whole role of museums in conservation and preservation. This issue is one that appears less relevant for discussions of very contemporary programs, but it couldn't be more important in helping artists become more aware of what's going to happen to something that they make and how it's going to be cared for. That's another side of things. But we all run with a huge schedule, and we're all laboring under a certain amount of guilt for not taking more of our time to mentor new staff as they come into the institution. I feel guilty about spreading that burden, but the curators and educators that have been there longer should share the responsibility of connecting with their peers and their new colleagues to kind of ease them into the situation.

**K.H.:** The one thing I like about living on the curatorial floor, as opposed to the administrative floor, is that I live also next to the interns. I thought you were going to say, Anne, that we get mentored.

**A.d'H.:** All the time.

**K.H.:** Which is really true.

**A.d'H.:** All the time.

**K.H.:** People who are coming directly out of graduate programs or from other kinds of institutions to work with us, they're nudging me forward. So, mentoring goes in lots of different ways.

**Peter Fleissig:** We've been talking about the DNA of museums. Can I ask the

panel what the implication would be if you were joined together as one museum?

**R.S.:** It would look like the chorus of “We Are the World.” I don’t know. I wanted to ask a question to Hans-Ulrich, because, in a sense, the work that you’ve done by interviewing and talking with Pontus Hulten and others is, in some ways, about that dynamic as well. It’s the transmission from one generation to another of curatorial practice. I wondered if you had anything personal, or otherwise, to say.

**Hans-Ulrich Obrist:** Concerning this research in general?

**R.S.:** Yes.

**H-U.O.:** On the one hand, I always see this transmission of curatorial knowledge from other generations. On the other hand, for a curator, somehow artists are also mentors, to a certain extent. I’ve learned most of the things I know in discussions with artists. In terms of the whole curating discussion, very often a lot of shows are very strongly artist self-curated. There have been a couple of books that have tried to pin down the one hundred most important exhibitions of the twentieth century, or the fifty most important exhibitions, etc., etc.. Within this framework, whatever the most objective choices, they required a big overlapping of shows, and a lot of them, at least fifty percent, had actually been artist self-organized. That’s something to keep in mind. In addition, the curator, very often, has a much more modest role in being the catalyst or the trigger or something like this. I like the notion of the catalyst, following Gordon Pask’s conception of cybernetics.

I recently reread Alexander Dorner’s list of what he thinks curating within a museum should be, and that was, indeed, early twentieth century, so I wanted to ask how you feel about some of these points one hundred years later, as directors of museums at the beginning of the twenty-first century. A few points have already been mentioned. Dorner viewed the museum as a multi-identity type of site, as a locus of the crossings of art and life, as well as a laboratory. Another notion Dorner explored is the museum based on a dynamic concept of art history, in his own words, “amidst the dynamic center of profound transformations.” And within this profound transformation, how a museum, in general, faces the notions of uncertainty and relativity. Another notion, the elastic museum, which Dorner beautifully describes. Elasticity, not only in terms of elastic display, but also elastic buildings. Last but not least, two more points, that are the most interesting ones and that I wanted particularly to emphasize. The museum, basically, as a bridge between the arts and other disciplines. In Dorner’s own words, “We

cannot understand the forces which are effective in the visual production of today if we do not have a look at other fields of modern life.” And the last point, the museum as a risk-taking pioneer. Particularly, how do you feel about this notion of risk and of the museum as pioneer?

**N.R.:** I don't think it's a question. Your listing is very admirable. It's incumbent on museums, curators, directors, entire institutions, to hold up a standard of exploration rather than simply reprocessing the current knowledge. So, it is a laboratory, it is an exploration. I would agree with that.

**A.d'H.:** We all get stiffer as we get older. Elasticity may be the hardest thing to keep going, but that's why this issue of mentoring, from new curators to old directors, is fairly important. We learn hugely from curators and artists how to make our institutions more flexible.