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The Global Contemporary

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According to the libertine Dolman c, the educator central to de Sade's 'boudoir philosophy', there is at once a simple but abysmally complex hypothesis. If it is true that every State is based on war (from ancient times onwards) then no State can claim the non-violent exercise of virtue from its citizens. Thus, each State is intrinsically self-contradictory and inevitably hurtles towards its own destruction. Rosen's work confronts and challenges the Zionist ideologies of post-Holocaust Jewish identity that underpin current Israeli policy.

NOTE

1. Giorgio Agamben, *Nudities*, David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella, trans, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2009, p 25

'Roe Rosen: Vile, Evil Veil', 21 March – 5 May 2012, Iniva, Rivington Place, London

  Stella Santacatterina and Juliet Steyn, 2012

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The Global Contemporary Art Worlds After 1989

Kerstin Winking

'The Global Contemporary: Art Worlds After 1989', curated by Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg and Peter Weibel for the ZKM Museum of Contemporary Art in Karlsruhe, gave an overview of what the curators considered to be global art. In order to disclaim the proposition that art is an exclusively Western affair, the exhibition showed that artists from all over the world now contest the notion of art. Since this accent on inclusiveness seems to have been the dominant criterion for selection, the resulting exhibition was overstuffed, superficial and anachronistic – and in this paradoxically succeeded in illustrating the notion of global art.

In the exhibition guide, the curators state that '*globalization* has replaced the concept of an international movement in art under the flag of the West'. They prefer

the term global art to contemporary art, which, they say, generally refers to art after modernism. People from regions where modernism never arrived need to be able to use global art as, in the curators' terms, 'a universal. . . forum where artists with diverse origins, and hence with equally diverse perspectives, thematize their working conditions and their personal experiences with the problem of a globalized world'. The preference for the term global art over contemporary art is based on the proposition that global art might leapfrog modernist discourse on art and instead directly tie up with Marcel Duchamp's position regarding the readymade: whether someone buys into the idea of a thing being global art depends on the presenter's power of persuasion, which is supported by the institutional context.

Having originated with 'GAM: Global Art and the Museum', a research project initiated by Peter Weibel and Hans Belting in 2006, 'The Global Contemporary' had an introductory section called 'Room of Histories' containing documentary material such as books, magazines and video recordings, which together functioned as the exhibition's theoretical skeleton, much like a written work's bibliography. By opting to use the genealogical method the curators indicated an intended break with the grand narratives of world art history. Nevertheless, the year 1989, when the exhibition 'Magiciens de la terre' took place in the Centre Pompidou in Paris, constitutes the point of departure for their story of global art. As Peter Weibel writes in the preface of the exhibition guide:

...the year 1989 signified the end of the Western monopolies. The rise of art from Asia, Africa, South America, etc. in Western institutions is nothing other than the legitimate attempt by other cultures, nations, and civilizations to strip the West of its monopoly on exclusion.

Yet the 'Room of Histories' provided little evidence to support this statement, and failed to show how the changes within curatorial practices in Western museums did not just come out of the blue. Critiques of assumed Western superiority over non-Western cultural productions had emerged long before 1989, from diverse regions and sources. Writers, musicians, activists, artists and other cultural producers, often engaged in anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles, shared the desire to break with Eurocentric conceptions of art and thought of ways and arguments to undermine them. Little by little, these critics disclosed Western cultural institutions' involvement in colonial processes and the frequently obfuscated propagation of the white man's superiority. Any story of art is simply incomplete and lifeless without a consideration of the events that actually

MIDDLE EASTERN LOUISE BOURGEOIS
RENOIR OF SOUTH AFRICA
JAPAN'S ANDY WARHOL
KOREAN MARK ROTHKO
IRANIAN JEFF KOONS
CINDY SHERMAN OF ASIA
DALI OF BALI
PICASSO OF INDIA
INDIAN DAMIEN HIRST
CHINESE GERHARD RICHTER
BRAZILIAN JOSEPH BEUYS
CHRISTO OF CHINA
AFRICAN ANSELM KIEFER
JASPER JOHNS OF KOREA
GOYA OF CAMBODIA

Leila Pazooki, *Moments of Glory*, 2010, courtesy the artist

led to the admission of newcomers to the discourse of art and ultimately to the appearance of what is described as global art in European art museums.

The presentation in the 'Room of Histories' of all issues of *Third Text*, the journal that has functioned as a platform for the discourse of art produced by non-Western artists and in non-Western regions, surely points in the right direction. Since 1987 the journal has been opening up exciting and multi-directional views on productions and positions of non-Western art professionals. It is highly doubtful, though, that people picked up the journals and read them on site; they were presented like artworks, and it would have been understandable if visitors thought that they were not allowed to touch anything.

By and large, the 'Room of Histories' provided a proper overview of how the notion of global art developed from its first appearance in the Centre Pompidou in 1989 to the exhibition in Karlsruhe. It paid significant attention to the spread of biennials and art fairs that now challenge the old permanently located institutions' authority over the definition of art. Likewise it showed effectively how these events have multiplied worldwide in recent years. The spectacular panorama screen displaying *trans_actions: The Accelerated Art World 1989–2011* (2011) by Stewart Smith, Robert Gerard Pietrusko and Bernd Lintermann, specially constructed for 'The Global Contemporary', and the presentation of Ben Lewis's film *The Great Contemporary Art Bubble* (2009) clearly set out global capital's complicity with global art. In distinct ways, both contributions demonstrated how global art events popped up in the wake of global capital.

The first work the visitor encountered after the 'Room of Histories' was *SUPER CHINA!* (2009), a large-scale painting by Navin Rawanchaikul depicting hundreds of figures engaged in activities ranging from archery and motorcycling to bathing or eating fast food. A glance into the exhibition guide reveals that the figures depict famous representatives of the Chinese art scene disguised as superstars. The exhibition guide also states that the painting celebrates 'an important emancipatory moment, since now, for the first time, a market for contemporary art independent from the Western art system has been established under the national label "China"'. In this sense, *SUPER CHINA!* was the first work testifying to the relationship between art and the global economy. Many more followed, especially those in the section aptly titled 'Art as Commodity'. Christian Jankowski's video *Kunstmarkt TV* (2008), for instance, directed the viewer's attention to art objects praised by a team of salespeople. The recorded scenery was staged like a home shopping programme, with the tel-

ephone numbers of order hotlines appearing on screen. The salespeople marketed art objects just as they would sell a cross-trainer or anti-wrinkle cream. The pun on art professionals and the discourse they produce was both blatantly obvious and very funny.

The irony marking Jankowski's work runs like a thread through the whole exhibition and makes a more serious approach to, for instance, Ondrej Brody & Kristofer Paetau's *Wang Bin Torture in Commercial Quality, High Quality and Museum Quality* (2010), difficult. The three paintings, made after a photograph of the maltreated corpse of Wang Bin, who was tortured to death in the Daqing Men's Labor Re-education Camp in China, are horrible. Given the choice between this and looking at works like Com&Com's *Mocmoc & Mermer* (2006–2011), Thierry Geofroy/Colonel's *Biennialist Mini Retrospective* (1989, ongoing) or Leila Pazooki's *Moments of Glory* (2010), which are all amusing comments on the flippancy of art, why should an exhibition visitor bother to engage with the more difficult subject addressed by Brody & Paetau? Maybe because in the setting of 'The Global Contemporary' their work was a somewhat lonely reminder of the fact that art is not necessarily out of touch with the sometimes harsh reality outside the protective walls of the exhibition space.

Taken as a whole, the works displayed in 'The Global Contemporary' were marked by a tedious focus on the theme of global art itself and on its detachment from life. They confirmed or ironically commented on art as a commodity on the global art market; they engaged in the age-old discussion on art's relation to language – its untranslatability; they account for the ways in which successful contemporary artists are dependent on air travel and how they engage with communities different from their own. In the section 'Boundary Matters' artists from all over the globe mock the Western institutions that claim to know what art is by introducing their own opinion on it. As part of 'The Global Contemporary', this section, including works such as Cai Yuan and Jian Jun Xi's *Two Artists Piss on Duchamp's Urinal* (2000) and Leila Pazooki's *Moments of Glory* (2010), showed how quickly critique of the institution of art becomes incorporated by the very system it criticises.

The curators' decision to be sparing in the presentation of work that addresses wider social and political issues may have to do with this neutralising effect of the art space. After all, many recent critiques have persuasively exposed contemporary art's relationship to global capital. Readers of Julian Stallabrass's *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art* (2004), for instance, are unlikely to have gained many new insights from the exhibition. Instead they might have found an

implied confirmation of Stallabrass's conclusion that the modern ideal of autonomous or free art is an 'ally' of 'free trade... as a model for global development'. Although this statement can be challenged as overestimating art's actual political relevance, the shared paths of global capital and contemporary art mean that it needs to be taken into consideration. As the work of people like George Osodi or Julian Röder demonstrates, art does not have to be a bland servant to global capital, but can function as a forum for the expression of discontent with global politics. Yet the exhibition in Karlsruhe gives no podium to such voices and so misses out on the most relevant and topical issue of our present, that is, the dysfunction of the contemporary global financial system.

All told, the accent in 'The Global Contemporary' lies on the work of artists who accept the conditions of global art and a globalised world; their most frequently employed and perhaps only weapon against it is irony. As a result, in this exhibition global art looks like fun more than anything else. Any serious attempt to militate against the effects that global politics has on the lives of non-conformist artists and like-minded thinkers has difficulty prevailing in this setting. Whether the curators intended this effect or not remains unclear, because they make no comment on it. Instead they appear as impartial administrators and researchers of global art.

'The Global Contemporary: Art Worlds After 1989', 17 September 2011–5 February 2012, ZKM Museum of Contemporary Art, Karlsruhe, Germany, curated by Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg and Peter Weibel

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'No One Has Yet Determined What Art Can Do' Gaming in Waziristan

Lee Mackinnon

I leave for Beaconsfield gallery as the evening news announces the execution of Mark Stroman in the

US, and arrive to see Clive Stafford-Smith, human rights lawyer and founder of Reprieve, who has just flown in from Texas where he was acting in Stroman's defence.¹

The black box of the world's media is beginning to reveal the knotty workings of its circuitry. My body is noticeably instrumental in this circuitry; a conduit through which the world's brutality and double standards is made manifest.

Beaconsfield is hosting a show entitled 'Gaming in Waziristan'. It aims to elicit a 'call to (peaceful) arms' to cultural practitioners, helping Reprieve to raise awareness of American human rights abuses in the use of unmanned drones to remotely target so-called insurgents in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

We make our way into the central gallery space where Clive will be in conversation with Shahzad Akbar, Pakistani human rights lawyer. The room is crowded with artists, lawyers, musicians, journalists, some of whom have already begun to organise a conference in Pakistan, and a rock concert to be held in London, both during the autumn.

The two men sit at a table with a low desk lamp that lights their faces from below. Behind them, unintentionally grainy images and video footage depict the devastation of illegal US bomb attacks on Pakistan, footage that has been taken at great personal risk by Noor Behram and assembled as *Documents from the Frontier 2007–2011*, smuggled across the border by Reprieve. We see a repeating reel of Quick-Time excerpts – a distant white drone against a blue sky; the bodies of boys and young men lying in state; what might be part of a hand or foot; the forbidden presence of women represented by fragments of cloth held up to the camera; a red bra that I mistake for bloodied tissue; a small child whose broken skull makes me avert my eyes.

The body itself here performs a border – site of violation and terror visited by an occupying army whose distance from the ground and lack of physical presence serves to make it invisible to itself. Yet these images do not feel remote, perhaps because they are presented in the context of a call for action.

Between the clips, text announces the time and place of attack, the number of dead. But it gives no names. A member of the audience is quick to point this out. Isn't there already enough news footage that renders the other nameless? Stafford-Smith points to the complexities that underlie this lack of information. He hopes that (the collective) *we* can do more to remedy this situation.

Another points to the problematic nature of such depictions and their consumption – is this art?