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Kathryn Andrews

Kathryn Andrews is an artist who lives and works in Los Angeles. Recent exhibitions include the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2014), and the Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2013).



Which recent exhibition did you find most inspiring and why?

I was intrigued by *David Bowie Is* [2013], which I saw in its incarnation at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto. It seemed to inadvertently avoid the pitfalls of much contemporary exhibition making where the living artist's influence is not distinguishable from the institution's—defined by its specific resources, space constraints, and obligations to funders. Bowie allowed the originating Victoria & Albert Museum curators access to his archive of 75,000 items with the stipulation that he would be uninvolved with subsequent display. The exhibition's large scope and glorifying theatrical presentation made clear, if one did not already know, that the artist was only minimally an agent. While this refusal makes perfect sense from Bowie, constant shape-shifter ever eluding norms, it made me wonder about other types of installations and

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how the influence of the institution could be more clearly distinguished from that of the artist. What I am talking about is a problem specific to exhibitions of living artists and the invisible ways that an institution's interests affect how the artist's work exists.

What are the functions of an exhibition?

Somewhere online I came across the definition of "function" as an activity or purpose natural to a thing. There are of course other definitions, but I liked this one because it sits in a funny way with the idea of an exhibition. The purpose natural to an exhibition is to make natural what is not to the viewer. What this means is of course impacted by the politics of the institution's supporters. Their willingness to be self-contradictory effects the kind of "unnatural" content that can be presented and in turn assimilated by visitors.

How important is display?

Display is extremely important due to the impossibility of experiencing the work apart from its context. Museums seem to err on the side of conservative display, so as not to overwhelm what is exhibited with competing aesthetic information.

Recently I saw several exhibitions that pushed display to an extreme with great effect. The Pompidou's *Surrealism and the Object* [2013–2014] housed sculptures in intimate rooms divided by standing scrims upon which historic film footage and photographs were projected. Seeing the quiet objects against flickering imagery made me rethink their presence as part of a larger social history that was chaotic and active.

I also enjoyed Christopher Williams' show at The Art Institute of Chicago [*The Production Line of Happiness*, 2014], which carefully treated its display as part of its subject. The exhibition was dispersed throughout the museum. Its interruptions and use of partial walls pointed back to the institution itself, keeping the viewer aware of the act of consuming the object in its environs.

Finally, some museums' recent invitations to artists to mount exhibitions from their collections have opened up new thinking around cultural histories. I found Trisha Donnelly's 2013 Artist's Choice exhibition at MoMA to be very poetic and compelling, revealing visual logics across multi-disciplinary 2-D works, without imposing an overarching didactic narrative. This type of gesture is important because it opens up ways of seeing via a very personal vision, which the museum itself could not originate with its obligations to make sense.

What is good museum architecture?

It is important for there to be many kinds of architecture, as different types of spaces allow for different types of programming. Personally, I prefer structures that do not have deep windowless sections where you feel as if you've entered a maze/prison. I also do not care for curved walls unless they have been designed for specific works.

How important are education and mediation?

I go both ways on this. I really enjoy coming to art without supplemental material. I think the challenge is to find a way to offer information about a work and its origins without attaching it to a master narrative. The question should be how can we open up ways of seeing works versus how can we explain them.

How important are the café and the museum store?

Great but not necessary. The availability of catalogues is a good way for visitors to immediately obtain more information about what they've seen. Finding these later isn't always easy—if one hasn't lost interest by then.

Should museums be producers?

An artist's work benefits from being not limited by one type of commercial system. When museums produce artists' works, artists can enter new territories without the expectations that they face when exhibiting in a commercial gallery setting.

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But many museums are largely funded by the same patrons who collect art. Galleries support museums through memberships and donations and often have close relationships with museum staff and benefactors. It is difficult to parse out how the museum-as-producer is truly autonomous from gallery-as-producer or artist-as-producer in collaboration with the commercial gallery.

I think we should look at what kinds of things are possible when the museum becomes a producer that wouldn't be otherwise. And what kind of value this offers.

Should museums be places of participation?

I think this is up to the artist to decide in relation to their work.

Does size matter?

No.

What role do or should artists have in a museum?

That is a difficult question. Who are the artists, how are they chosen? And how can they represent positions that run counter to the institution's status quo/history when they are dependent upon the institution itself for their appointment?

The radicality of artist's positions within the institution is contingent upon the museum's willingness to self-implode. The welcoming of contention within the institution itself, among its governing parties, whether a municipality, a dominant board member (or members), or staff is more important than the inclusion of any particular artist. If that willingness is there, artists can assist.

What is the role of private collectors?

Private collectors are of extreme importance in supporting art positions that are radical/unassimilated. Collectors' abilities to bridge the relationship between artists and institutions, making possible the viewing of "difficult" works directly to the public is invaluable.

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How important is history for a museum of contemporary art?

Very important. And all kinds, the history of museums themselves, art history, and history at large. With a strong sense of history contemporary art museums can have a better sense of mission.

Where do you see the main challenges for museums today?

Securing funding while retaining autonomy in terms of programming.

Do you have a dream of a perfect museum of contemporary art?

No.