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János Szoboszlai:

DOES CONTEMPORARY ART NEED MUSEUMS ANYMORE?

As for the director of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Dunaujvaros, Hungary, please let me make some comments on the topic of Session I. : "Does contemporary art need museums anymore?".

Obviously, a big number of contemporary artworks do not need the Museum, as a space - but here I do not want to discuss the new genres of media-images (from photography to film, from video to digital technology and the internet) and their way of appearance, or the performativ arts or the site-specific interventions - although usually the projects where these images appear are curated and organized by the Museum... I would like to focus more on the state of the Museum that exhibits contemporary visual art production in the region of Central-Eastern Europe. At the same time I do not want to go deeper into the problematics of the "cultural logic" (F. Jameson) of capitalism and visual art. I concentrate more on the surface, the hardware, to understand the current situation where from we can move ahead.

The thesis:

My answer for the question - Does contemporary art need museums anymore? - is the following:

Yes it does - but not necessary as a space but as an agent.

My thesis is that the Museum must take an other, a new function: to be the main power of the visual art lobby, the agent and main actor of the enhancement - I mean: "modernisation" - of the institutional frame of art. No other institution or organisation can fulfill this task. But needless to say: the Museum in the region is not prepared and not ready to take this job.

I.

The state of the Museum

(~: exhibition space - gallery - for contemporary visual art)

Here I am following *Daniel Buren's text: Function of the museum* (Artforum, 1973 September, p. 68.)

Privileged place with a triple role:

1. **Aesthetic.** *The Museum is the frame and effective support upon which the work is inscribed/composed. It is at once the centre in which the action takes place and the single (topographical and cultural) viewpoint for the work.*

(This is a valid statement in Central-Eastern Europe too. - SzJ.)

2. **Economic.** *The Museum gives a sales value to what it exhibits, has privileged/selected. By preserving or extracting it from the commonplace, the Museum promotes the work socially, thereby assuring its exposure and consumption.*

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(In this region the infrastructure of contemporary art - including museums and galleries - could only partly be used and utilized, and it is extremely inefficient at mediating contemporary arts to society, the international art world, the potential audience and potential buyers. At most of cases a show in a Museum is indifferent to the sales value of the artist's works. At the same time the social reputation of contemporary visual art is not better since 1990 - it is even worse and worse. - SzJ.)

3. *Mystical.* *The Museum/Gallery instantly promotes to "Art" status whatever it exhibits with conviction, i.e. habit, thus diverting in advance any attempt to question the foundations of art without taking into consideration the place from which the question is put. The Museum (the Gallery) constitutes the mystical body of Art.*

(In our region the word 'mystical' can be replaced with the word 'irritating', Contemporary visual art production seems to be a hardly understandable, irritating body for decision-makers, politicians, ministers of culture, marketing- and PR-directors, teachers and the so-called audience. Artist and museum-leaders: they are the ones who cry and cry for bigger and bigger slice of the cake from the national- or the local budget. And they are the ones who return nothing for the support - no income, no thousands of visitors, no media-presence. Instead of these: they produce troubles, debates, fight. The museums - and everything that they promote - are parasites of the economy and the society. Success happen within a small and exclusive ghetto. The old modernist ethic still rules: "...the denial of economic reality: the genesis of an artistic or literary field is like the emergence of an inverted economic world, in which the sanction of the market becomes indifferent or even negative: the bestseller is not automatically acclaimed and commercial success can be synonymous with condemnation." (Pierre Bourdieu: The Economy of Symbolic Goods, Blocknotes, No.6., 1994. pp.122-127.) -SzJ.)

Of course, there is the historical explanation. Following the Second World War the particular political-economic situation of the countries of Central Europe brought about a complex equation: „official” art becoming non-art came to the fore within the legitimized frames of the institutional system, while progressive neo-avant-garde art running parallel with international trends was isolated from public view, and the institutional system was left undeveloped.

The argument:

After 1989, the visual arts in the post-communist countries inherited an infrastructure which could only partly be utilized, and which was extremely inefficient at mediating contemporary arts to

- society,
- the international art world,
- the potential audience
- and potential market.

As a result, the contemporary visual arts in the Central European region remain:

- a marginalized and isolated sphere of culture to this very day;
- the commercial art market has not expanded;
- artistic theory battles against several decades of backwardness;
- visual arts teaching is not an integrated part of overall educational strategy.

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In particular, the financing and distribution of artistic productions is in crisis, as the financial resources of both the state and foundations, that is non-profit sector, are increasingly unable to support the arts, let alone inspire artistic development.

The existing policy and the mission of the Museum is blurred, it is not transparent, it is not clear. Therefore it is very difficult to predict its next steps. The existing methods of the Museums (fundraising, public relations, museum communication, exhibition policy, marketing, media-presence) are far not efficient, effective and enough.

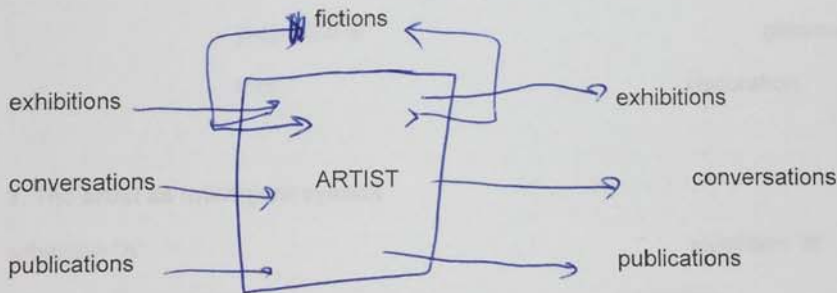
II.

Artistic practice

Here I am following the figures of the *Cercle Ramo Nash: L'artiste en tant que systeme* (Blocknotes, No.6., 1994. pp.26-29. translated from French: Katalin Szoke, from Hungarian: SzJ.)

The following figures - though they seem quite ironic - can explain the relationships of the artist and the institutional frame (including Museum, curators, media, other artists, gallerists, collectors and critics).

1. The artist as self-organizing system



All systems contains other systems.

The artist is a system in the system of art.

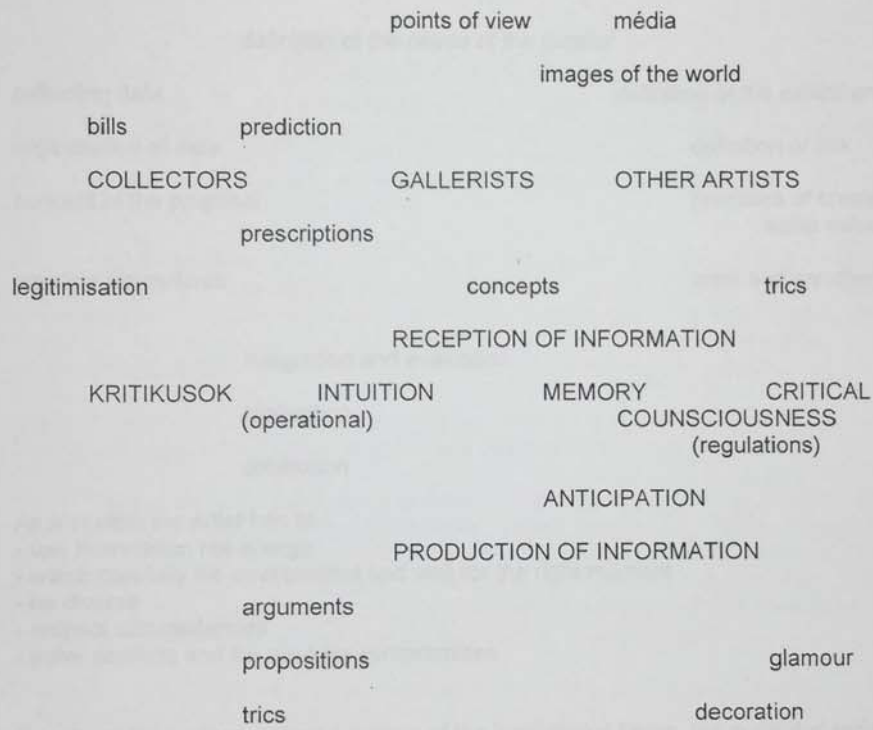
The artist as a system has to:

- always use his connections and relations effectively
- be well-organized
- keep his identity
- vary his behaviour and productions
- present progress

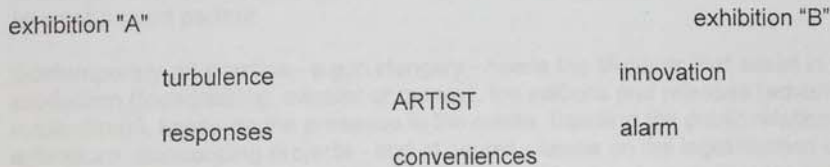
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2. The artist as open system



3. The artist as intelligent system



- Intelligence means to be able to keep on living and be autonomous in the different and changing contexts
- For an artist it is enough to look intelligent to be intelligent artist
- If an artist is not intelligent his production can be intelligent
- To be intelligent the artist needs a network. If it exists, his friend can think and work instead of the artist. It is a global system of logic. It creates a virtual reality that makes itself exist.

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4. Program of a group-show

	definition of the needs of the curator	
collecting data		definition of the exhibition
organisation of data		definition of risk
concept of the proposal		premises of creating the sales value
creating alternatives		tests and enrichment
	integration and evaluation	
	realisation	
	promotion	

- As a system the artist has to
- use information not energy
 - watch carefully his environment and wait for the right moment
 - be diverse
 - respect circumstances
 - solve conflicts and be open for compromises

Despite of the underdeveloped system of the institutional frame, the current standard of artistic practice is in many cases on a par with international trends at quality, self-organisation, self-management and critical consciousness. At the same time to build up mutual understanding and relations with the existing system is difficult since the policy and the mission of the Museum is blurred, it is not clear, it is not transparent. The Museum is the less bad place to exhibit - and fare not a good partner.

Contemporary art practice - e.g. in Hungary - needs the Museum that assist in the process of production (foundraising, transfer of money), the editions and releases (advertisement, publications), keeps on the presence in the media, handling the public relations, curating exhibitions, announcing projects - and of course - keeps on the legitimisation of the artwork. Experience shows that no other institutions but the Museum is the adequate agent of contemporary visual art. In Hungary 99% of art projects are linked to the Museum - at least they end up in the Museum or next to it (see: Media Model, arc-posters, etc.).

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III.

An attempt

The institutional frame and its institutions - mainly the Museums - have to adjust themselves to the new market-based economic formations. The support from foundations and the non-profit sector is of a short-term nature and - in the long-term - it actually leads to the isolation of the arts from society and economic realities. The methods used to effect such an adjustment - marketing, financing, project management, public relations - have to be fashioned according to the contemporary arts and the region.

This demands that we nurture a team of professionals who, employing relatively new, innovative methods, are capable of achieving results in the for-profit and/or non-profit spheres. In this situation it is essential to carry out a study of the institutional system of contemporary fine arts and for proposals to be put forward for the modernization of the system as well as the raising of a group of professionals working within the given market conditions.

The Institute of Contemporary Art launched a research project in the year 2000. The project - supported by the Open Society Institute - has three steps.

Step 1. Researching the institutional system of contemporary arts in the Central European region. Here I am considering the institutional system in its totality, viz.: presentation spaces (exhibition halls, galleries, museums), art trade, theory (science of art history, the theory of art, art-sociology), education (schools of art and general artistic training), the role of the media (critiques, reports, cultural programs), the activities of curators, support (foundations, sponsors, donors, commissions) and the art policy pursued by the governments.

Step 2. An examination of existing methods of marketing, financing, project management and public relations employed in the Western European region. The study of systems introduced to finance culture which have proven their market viability.

Step 3. Establishing a series of workshops at the ICA-D. These workshops are for helping professionals who have already undergone theoretical tuition (generally art history) ensure the continuity of art productions within the new economic environment, their appearance in the media, the more intensive appearance of contemporary fine arts in culture, and the broadening of the commercial art market. Leaders and members of the workshops are lawyers, tax-experts, business-consultants, marketing- and PR managers and museum-managers from Western- as well as Eastern Europe. The key concepts of this workshops: financing, project management, marketing, public relations, mutual relations with the business, the politics and the society. This is policy-making.

Conclusion:

The Museum as a historic entity has local and international roots and experiences. It is a member of some international networks. The museum-staff has the knowledge of contemporary art production and tendencies. The museum-management has to learn the know-how from the economic world to be able to represent and promote the contemporary art production.

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No other institution or organisation can fulfill this task. Experience shows that ministries of culture focus on short-time - 4 year long - projects. The universities and research centers or academies of science usually keep distance with contemporary art and its institutions. Art is basically indifferent for business - it is not a good investment of advertisement since its reputation is bad compared to the sports, popculture and other disabled spheres of culture.

The Museum must be able to develop a policy therefore to be a succesful actor of the economic reality. My thesis is that the Museum must take an other, a new function: to be the main power of the visual art lobby, the agent and main actor of the modernisation of the institutional frame of art.

19 10 - 16 10 Friday, 17th September
14 10 - 11 10 Monday, 20th September

Looking Museum Budapest
Museum of Contemporary Art

AGENDA

1. Opening of the Meeting
2. Minutes of the January 1999 Meeting and workplan
3. Resolutions and Comments on the Report
4. Membership
5. Future Programme:
 - a) Exhibitions
 - b) Working Groups
 - c) Newsletter
 - d) Web Page
 - e) Other
6. Budget 2000-2001
7. "Scholarships"
8. Budapest Planetary Meeting 2001
9. Board Minutes 2000
10. 2000 News
11. Any other Business
12. Closing Meeting

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CIMAM ICOM

International Committee of ICOM for Museums and Collections of Modern Art
Comité International de l'ICOM pour les Musées et les Collections d'Art Moderne

The International Council of Museums
Conseil International des Musées

GENERAL MEETING BUDAPEST 2000

09.30 - 10.15 Friday, 22nd September
10.00 - 11.00 Monday, 25th September

Ludwig Museum Budapest
Museum of Contemporary Art

AGENDA

1. Opening of the Meeting
2. Minutes of the Jerusalem 1999 Meeting and Matters Arising
3. President's and Secretary/Treasurer's Reports
4. Membership
5. Future Programme
 - a) Publications
 - b) Working Groups
 - c) Newsletter
 - d) Web Pages
 - e) Other
6. Budget 2000-2001
7. "Scholarships"
8. Barcelona Plenary Meeting 2001
9. Board Elections 2001
10. ICOM News
11. Any other Business
12. Close of Meeting

Concentration
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reality.

ICOM
July 1-6
CIMAM
29th-5th

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CIMAM GENERAL MEETING
'Does Contemporary Art Need Museums Anymore?'
Ludwig Museum Budapest -
Museum of Contemporary Art
September 21-26, 2000

September 21, Wednesday

Arrivals

Registration at hotels

- 18.00 Opening of the US exhibition 'Illusions of Eden' (Ohio Arts Council) at the Ludwig Museum
- 19.30 pm Reception at the Museum

September 22, Friday

- 08.45 Pick-up from hotels
- 09.00 - 09.30 Continuation of registration
- 09.30 - 10.15 CIMAM General Meeting and discussion
- 10.15 - 11.00 **Session I: Does Contemporary Art Need Museums Anymore?**
- 11.00 - 11.30 Keynote address by Marina Grini (Ljubljana)
- 11.00 - 11.30 Coffee break
- 11.30 - 13.00 Interventions
- 13.00 - 14.30 Buffet lunch at the Museum
- 14.30 - 17.30 **Session II**
- Interventions and discussion
- 16.00 Refreshments
- 18.00 Back to hotels
- 20.30 Reception with invited artists (Kiscelli Museum)

September 23, Saturday

- 09.00 Pick-up from hotels
- 09.30 - 10.30 Lecture with slide projection on the Hungarian art scene
- 10.30 - 13.30 Art and architecture tour in the city guided by András Török
- and János Gerle
- 13.30 - 15.00 Buffet lunch in the museum

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- 15.00 - 18.00 **Session III**
Continuation of Working Session with interventions and discussion
- 16.30 *Refreshments*
- 18.00 *Back to hotels*
- 19.00 *Departure for the Gödöllő Royal Castle (30 km from Budapest, favourite place of Sissi, Queen Elizabeth of Hapsburg)*
- 20.00 - 23.00 *Visit to the restored part of the castle and dinner with live classical music*
- 23.00 *Departure for Budapest*

September 24, Sunday

- 8.00 *Departure for Pécs, South Hungary (200 km from Budapest)*
- 11.00 *Csontváry Museum (with refreshments)
 Modern Picture Gallery, Erzsébet Schaár Museum, Vasarely, etc.*
- 14.00 - 15.30 *Buffet lunch at the Baranya County Hall*
- 15.30 *Departure for Siklós and Villány*
- 16.30 - 19.00 *Siklós Castle, Open Air Sculpture Park
 Wine tasting in Villány*
- 19.00 - 21.00 *Dinner in Villány at Fülemlő (Nightingale) Restaurant*
- 21.00 *Departure for Budapest*

September 25, Monday

- 10.00 - 11.00 *General Meeting*
- 11.00 - 13.30 *Visit to the Hero's Square: Museum of Fine Arts and M csarnok (Art Hall)*
- 13.30 - 14.30 *Lunch at the Vajdahunyad Castle (Museum of Agriculture)*

Afternoon free (optional visits to artists' studios or galleries)

- 17.00 - 19.00 *Board Meeting*
- 19.00 - 22.00 *Evening on the Danube by ship with farewell dinner*

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September 26, Tuesday

September 26, 2000

Individual departures and optional post-congress tour of Vienna

In the Working Sessions 15 minute interventions will be made by, amongst others, Nicholas Bourriaud, Andrei Erofeev, Paulo Herkenhoff, Frank Lubbers, Milan Kníak, Kstutis Kuizinas, Lars Nittve and János Szoboszlai.

New York, NY 10027-2000

Dear Jay

Thank for the list of the CIMAM/Budapest participants. Did everyone on the list already (I thought you said that there weren't too many people at the meeting.)

We would certainly be glad to look at the possibility of helping museum personnel from Western and Central Europe go to future meetings, and the chances of our being able to do will be greater when the meeting is held in that region or in the United States. Because of limited funds, we have only very rarely been able to cover conference expenses going to meetings in Western Europe. But keep us posted on your plans.

Best,

R. L.
Richard L. Lamm
Director

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ROOM 5600
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NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10112

September 28, 2000

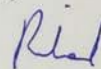
Mr. Jay Levenson, Director
International Program
Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53rd Street
New York, NY 10019-5498

Dear Jay:

Thanks for the list of the CIMAM/Budapest participants. Did everyone on the list attend? (I thought you said that there weren't too many people at the meeting.)

We would certainly be glad to look at the possibility of helping museum personnel from Eastern and Central Europe go to future meetings, and the chances of our being able to do will be greater when the meeting is held in that region or in the United States. Because of limited funds, we have only very rarely been able to assist conference attendees going to meetings in Western Europe. But keep us posted on your plans.

Best,



Richard S. Lanier
Director