

# The multifaceted curator in question

An unprecedented proliferation of art and art exhibitions has taken place in the past few decades, and as art curators have multiplied in a similar rhythm and as their position has gained prominence, questions about the tasks, risks and responsibilities of curators have occupied many a mind.

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Contributor/Jakarta

The London-based *Contemporary* magazine tackled the question last year in a special issue, interviewing prominent curators like Frances Bonami, Hou Hanru, Maurizio Cattelan, Massimiliano Gioni, Roselee Goldberg and many more. In Jakarta, *Visual Arts Magazine* dedicates a major part of its issue to the discussion.

But particularly noteworthy was the initiative of the Goethe Institut, together with the Asia-Europe Foundation, which recently acted upon a vision for the future in an effort to find new strategies for the changing role of curators.

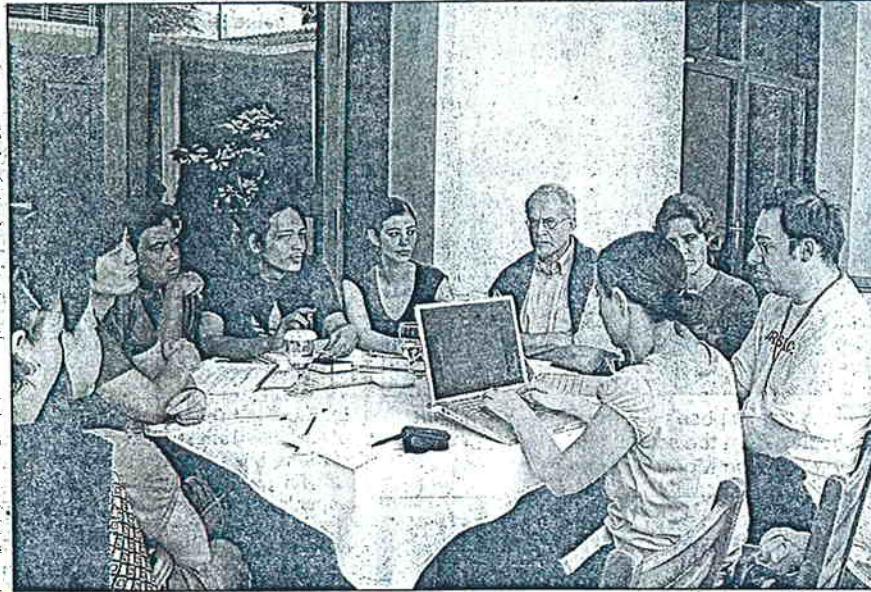
Marla Stukenberg of Goethe Institut Jakarta revealed it was part of the bigger vision implied in ArtConexions, a project that seeks to blur cultural, mental and, in a way, nationalistic obstacles.

The one-week workshop on the Multifaceted Curator, held recently in Jakarta and Bandung, brought together 18 young curators, all under 40 years of age, from Germany, Hungary, France, Greece, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Portugal, Italy, the United Kingdom, China, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Korea and Indonesia. The curators were chosen based on their proven interest in cross-cultural concepts.

Interesting was the fact that all the participants had a certain level of curatorial experiences and each was trying to give their best to what they thought was the best in their specific situations.

Remarkably, 12 of the 18 curators were women, with Binna Choi and Kyung Hwa Choi from South Korea working as curators in The Netherlands and Sweden, while Italian Nataline Colonello is a curator in Beijing. Hungarian artist/curator SUE Hajdu works in Ho Chi Minh City and Maria Josi Albuquerque Tavares from Portugal works at the Audio-Visual and Interactive Technology Services of Macao's Scientific and Cultural Center in Lisbon.

Meanwhile, the only male participant working outside his home country was the globe-trotting curator Thomas Berger of Germany, who is now working in Hong Kong.



JPI/Carla Bianpoen

Goethe Institut secretary-general Hans-Georg Knopp (center, wearing glasses) takes part in a discussion attended by 18 curators from Asia and Europe during the Multifaceted Curator seminar in Bandung, West Java: Goethe Institut organized the event to find new strategies for the changing role of curators.

So in the context of contemporary art developments and increasing cultural exchange, in this case between Asia and Europe: What is the curator's role, does he/she work alone or in a team, how does a curator relate to his/her employer if any, the artist, the environment, cultural issues, in the local/global constellation, and how about the curator's responsibility toward the artists, the artworks, contemporary art developments and society?

The curatorial practices of

the 18 participants appear to have similar conceptual visions toward developing contemporary art and engaging the general public, but face different realities vis-a-vis geographical, historical, sociopolitical and cultural characteristics, and place-specific strategies have to be followed.

In Vietnam, for instance, as gallery owner and curator Do Thi Thuyet Mai revealed, where both the public and the government are not very familiar with contemporary art, she organizes exhibitions inviting high-profile

international speakers, which nevertheless require endless patience to explain the importance of the event for the bureaucracy to issue a permit.

The question of curator-artist relations came with a special note in the case of the recent Indonesian CP Biennale, where some artists are now facing the threat of imprisonment for an alleged uncompromising work exhibited at the event.

Unlike in Europe, or the West in general, most Asian

countries do not boast a long tradition of curatorial practice, and exhibitions are often in either off-spaces or commercial galleries led by new freelance curators who lack training or experience. On the other hand, curators from abroad who have international experience need to familiarize themselves with site-specific social and cultural contexts.

It became clear that it was not possible to establish one strategy valid across regions and continents, given the many different realities and disparities in educational backgrounds.

So how to help close the gap?

One suggestion was for joint curatorial exhibitions in which a few curators from different countries would take part. Some have already outlined a big project in which all the participants of the workshop would join the curatorial team.

Another suggestion, which may have a broader impact, is to establish an Open Academy for Curatorial Studies for which the European participants could become the resource in a vice-versa benefit of cultural knowledge/practice. Enin Supriyanto, curator-art critic, suggested the academy start in Indonesia, from where it could eventually expand to other countries in the region.

If this happens, then surely various comments made in the seminar should be borne in mind. For one, Keren Detton of France, a graduate of Ecole du Magasin-CNAC, Grenoble,

who has an master of arts in art history from the Sorbonne, who blends permanent work with freelance curatorship, noted the importance of deliberation in cultural, post-colonial and gender studies.

Eileen Legaspi Ramirez from the Philippines, who engages in considerations on how intra- and cross-cultural exchanges in the spheres of art scholarship and curatorial practice can lead to mutual understanding, the ideal curator should also be knowledgeable in such parallel fields as international law, visual communications, education, new technology, sociology, cultural studies, politics, economics, etc.

Perhaps most importantly, as seasoned international curator Ute Meta Bauer noted on being a curator, is to instill a sense of the urgency of providing access to contemporary practices, in which having a backbone, vision and imagination are paramount.

The dynamic group and individual discussions during a week in Jakarta and Bandung on issues of identity, language, local and global, presentation and representation have certainly led to important insights, fostered friendships and forged close relationships, and was an important phase in each of the participant's experience of cross-cultural encounters, a major contribution to the cultivation of relationships between the self and others.

It is hoped that the "seeds" planted in the workshop will eventually come into full bloom in the not too distant future.



## Ute Meta Bauer

# The ultimate multifaceted curator

**F**or Ute Meta Bauer, the most important responsibility of a curator is providing access to education, including an understanding of artistic practices.

Recently appointed director of the Visual Arts Program at the Department of Architecture at MIT, Bauer is a seasoned curator, a term which for her implies an understanding of education. Her participation in a recent one-week workshop on the Multifaceted Curator in Jakarta and Bandung added significance to the search for new strategies toward a wider ranging role of the curator.

"It's not about curatorial alone. It's about artistic reflection and engendering stimulation in society," Bauer underlined in an interview on the last day of the Goethe Institut-organized workshop last March, on a bus from Bandung to Jakarta.

Bauer sees curatorial practice as a means to focus on the importance of context, time and place in the perception of art, to explore politics with a different language and to position art as a relevant



JP/Carla Bianpoen

UTE META BAUER

voice in society.

Indeed, Bauer was a driving force behind the integration of critical discourse and art throughout the 1990s, as documented by reviews

appreciating her commitment to integrating critical discourse and art. This was particularly evident in her concept for the 3rd Berlin Biennale, which was to highlight issues of social, political and cultural developments and conflicts that touched the people of Berlin and beyond. In addition, she has curated exhibitions in multiple media and across multiple cultures that have received wide critical praise.

Her background may have added to her "activist" visions of cultural interactions and societal transformations. Bauer was born in 1958 in Stuttgart, Germany. "I come from a working-class family," she revealed.

For political reasons, her grandfather was not allowed to have a job, pushing her grandmother into joining the workforce, quite a step for a woman of those days. Even more surprising was her godmother, who at 18 years went to the United States all by herself. So, besides working-class values, gender equality was a natural logic in her family.

The first in her family to go to

university, Bauer studied at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Hamburg (Academy of Fine Arts Hamburg), where she received her diploma with honors in Visual Communication/Stage Design in 1987. As artistic director of Künstlerhaus Stuttgart (1990 to 1994), her program, which was structured around renegotiating institutional parameters to consider current artistic practices, included reviewing "historically" classified practices linked to feminist, architecture and media discourses. These issues emerged in her curating of *Architectures of Discourse* (Barcelona, 2001), *First Story – Women Building/New Narratives for the 21st Century* for the European Cultural Capital Porto 2001, and the artist-in-residence program at ArtPace in San Antonio, Texas (2004).

Her career has showed the same consistency in her commitment to the visions she has of the role of contemporary art in shaping a just and humane society.

At the Academy of Fine Arts in

Vienna, she was professor of theory, practice and transfer of contemporary art (1996 until recently). The theory included sociology, gender and post-colonial. During that period she also served as head of the Institute of Contemporary Art (from 1996 to 2001) and as head of the Institute for Art and Cultural Science (from 2003 to 2004). In 2002 and 2003 she held the position of vice rector and has been in charge of the international affairs of the academy. From 1992 to 1994, Bauer was founding editor of the magazine *META*.

A curator for exhibitions and presentations on contemporary art, film, video with a focus on trans-disciplinary formats, Bauer has also served as director for various institutions as well as adviser for a number of high-profiled cultural boards, such as chairwoman of the art advisory board of the Goethe-Institutes and as a member of the International Board of the Bauhaus Foundation in Dessau.

Bauer, who strongly believes in cooperation and teamwork, is a

founding director of the Norwegian Office for Contemporary Art, Oslo, a private foundation founded by the Ministry of Culture and Church and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to develop collaborations in contemporary art between Norway and the international art scene.

Between 1999 and 2002, with artistic director Okwui Enwezor, she was co-curator of *Documenta 11*, an exhibition that takes place every five years and enjoys a reputation for providing the broadest overview of contemporary art worldwide.

In her effort to provide as much access as possible to education about artistic practices, Bauer goes out of her way, meeting as many people as possible across geographical and cultural borders. She evidently is of the opinion that not to create a space for artistic practice education while you can is a form of repression. "I am against systemic repression."

— Carla Bianpoen