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# Exploring the New Internationalism

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## REFERENCES

*Pour une nouvelle géographie artistique des années 90*, Bordeaux : capcMusée d'art contemporain, 2001, (Lectures de l'art contemporain)

*Expériences du divers : Jimmie Durham, Hanayo, Chéri Samba, Tsuneko Taniuchi*, Rennes : Presses universitaires, 2000

- 1 The post-colonial and post-Cold War world reality, associated with the global expansion of the market and of information flows, have led the West, inevitably, to engage with the "Other". The world and history have entered a period where the new economic competition is mixed up with the variety of local cultures that Eurocentric discourse had excluded. The traditionally binary scheme of relations, polarised on the West and Non-West, Centre and Periphery, which were the basic structures of international power, is rapidly disintegrating, as well as its geopolitical model and way of thinking.
- 2 During the Nineties, if the concepts concerned with this "new internationalism" have catalysed debates and theories, especially in the Anglo-Saxon art world, little attention has been paid to them in France, even though, as a consequence of French colonial and post-colonial history, it is one of the world's most multicultural countries.
- 3 And yet the initiatives undertaken at that time, both in the West and beyond, were indeed necessary in order to promote a more global re-appreciation of the widened historical, social and cultural context. This new and characteristically postmodern consciousness not only led to changes in curatorial methodologies but also, and above all, encouraged a truly international and multicultural understanding of contemporary artistic creation, one freed from hegemonic and ethnocentric value judgements.
- 4 This is why the still considerable gaps in French discourse on these issues are in themselves enough to make us welcome the simultaneous publication of *Pour une nouvelle géographie artistique des années 90*, which brings together the texts of five talks given at the

capcMusée in Bordeaux in 1997 and 1998, and *Expériences du divers*, the catalogue of the exhibition at Galerie Art & Essai in 1999 featuring Jimmie Durham, Hanayo, Chéri Samba and Tsuneko Taniuchi. (This latter publication is completed by a glossary that will be useful to anyone wishing to find out more about this tendency and its associated concepts.)

- 5 Although these two volumes constitute serious and complementary tools, including contributions by theoreticians, art critics, curators and artists of whom many have played a decisive role in the recent decentralisation of contemporary culture and art, it is nonetheless regrettable that the Rennes catalogue allows no space for the artists to express themselves (their work and “ideas” are analysed by French students), whereas the exhibition curators are given long interviews and are, furthermore, all “white Europeans”. Thus the structure, not to say the spirit, seems to reproduce a particular Western practice implying a hierarchical advantage which elsewhere (mainly in the Anglo Saxon countries), was modified, and even overturned, a long time ago now. In the introduction, a translation of a major text by Cornel West, an influential Black American theoretician and professor, whose work has remained well nigh unpublished in France, does go some way towards making up for this regrettable tendency. All the same, this text from 1990 could have been considered with more attention: in the name of communities and nations that have been oppressed, erased or “interpreted” by the West, this activist calls for the recognition of equal status, and for an existence and dignity that can only mean “freedom of expression” and the “power of self-representation”.
- 6 It is not surprising, therefore, that the two books should allot considerable space to Jean-Hubert Martin. In his text and interview, the French curator reaffirms his faith in the project he launched with the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou; Grande Halle de la Villette, 1989), and continued with *Galerie des Cinq Continents* (Paris: Musée National des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie, 1995-98). Of course, *Magiciens de la Terre* is considered to have been the first truly international exhibition, and had the merit of initiating the debate on multiculturalism in art. But it is a little worrying to see that, in spite of the numerous controversies that this show also sparked (and which were due in part to its residual but powerful ethnocentric criteria) and in spite of the major changes in the historical and geopolitical context since 1989, this curator’s position should have remained as it was, and that people should still be listening to it.
- 7 He has yet to acknowledge the need to analyse and respond to the opening up of frontiers which now allows for varied inter-cultural exchanges. At the 2000 Lyon Biennale, which he curated, and for which he discusses his plans here, those old frontiers were even rebuilt in the form of large curtains partitioning the different cultures and traditions, and thus making them even more isolated from our reality.
- 8 The contributions to the capc-Bordeaux book are thus enlightening in that they were chosen in order to reflect on the cultural formations generated by the great upheavals of the 1990s and the acceleration of globalisation process witnessed during that decade. The statements by the artists Jimmie Durham (an American Indian now living in Europe) and Kendell Geers (Johannesburg), as well as the contributions by the independent teachers and curators Catherine Dyogot (Saint Petersburg) and Apinan Poshyananda (Bangkok), thus offer more aware and interventionist responses to this new reality, providing readers with the necessary counterbalance to all the *clichés*. The world needs to be seen and apprehended differently—that is to say, with a sense of the economic, political and social complexities of the ties between contemporary cultures and nations. Indeed, in

their artistic and curatorial practices, the accent is very much on hybridity, rootlessness, nomadism, migration and local/global shifts—all of which constitute and characterise the very essence of contemporary identities and cultures. If these analyses reveal that it is no longer possible nowadays to consider the art of non-Western areas in terms of alternatives (as J-H. Martin does), they also make it clear that modernism was a global phenomenon, and that we must now accept the need to encourage and develop new interpretations of it. For it is indeed on the basis of this new discerning viewpoint that we can hope to grasp and assess the new geography of contemporary art.