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Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes

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Her books include: *Brian O'Doherty/ Patrick Ireland: Word, Image and Institutional Critique* (ed., Valiz 2017); *Post-War Germany and 'Objective Chance': W.G. Sebald, Joseph Beuys and Tacita Dean* (Steidl 2011); *James Joyce als Inspirationsquelle für Joseph Beuys* (Olms 2001); and *Joyce in Art* (Lilliput 2004).

She has curated for: Royal Hibernian Academy and Goethe Institut, Dublin; Tolstoy Estate, Russia; MoA, Seoul National University, Korea; Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast; LCGA, Limerick; CCI, Paris; Maagdenhuis, University of Amsterdam; M HKA, Antwerp, and the VanAbbeMuseum, Eindhoven.

Literary Art Exhibitions and Artists' and Curators' Solidarity in Times of Historical Change

This issue of *Zeszyty Artystyczne* provides a particularly welcome, but also daunting opportunity to sketch a curatorial practice and research project in both separate and coherent exhibitions that has emerged for me as a necessary method and mode of publication in parallel with academic work as an art historian exploring the intersection of social practice and literature. This work, I hope, combines to form, however tentatively, a curatorial stance, a philosophy of what can (and arguably should) be done with exhibitions.

There are two roots for this body of work: my long-term interest in artists interpreting and responding to the literature of James Joyce – with Joseph Beuys (and his generation of politically interested artists) being the main case study. Secondly, my socialization in Central Europe: I grew up in the environs of Goethe museums and in circles which read Schiller, the Bible and other canonical literature for its liberating elements. This background took me to social practice (and Beuys) in another way, one in which the institution of the (literary) museum has since Romanticism involved a socio-political intention, namely to further nation-building through culture. Early literary houses and museums were made public to stress the community-forging element of a shared language: by creating places of pilgrimage, one could help or make operational the imagined community that literature built, in order to forge a nation.¹ Before this background, art and its exhibitions immediately appear as players in the social and political realm (how far nation-building may now be from one's mind). Living and working in Belfast for a decade has made me appre-

» 1 See: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London, New York: Verso (1983) 2016.

ciative of the effects that Beuys' presence there in 1974 has had: his help (framed through the Free International University for Interdisciplinary Research) given to artists' self-organized infrastructures that have achieved much during difficult times through bringing people together, who in turn tuned art, organizations and exhibition strategies to the needs and affordances of the "Troubles".²

My curatorial trajectory began in Dublin, where, in 2004, I curated the central art exhibition, *Joyce in Art*, to mark the 100th anniversary of "Bloomsday", 16 June 1904: the day on which Joyce's *Ulysses* is set in Dublin. My work has thus initially been geographically focused on Ireland (Dublin and Belfast) and stretched to various corners of the world, where I showed *Joyce in Art*-related exhibitions – "extracts" from the book of the same title³ – in different contexts, in order to test them in a literary museum (the Tolstoy Estate National Museum, Yasnaya Polyana, Russia, 2010), a university museum (MoA, Seoul National University, Seoul, South Korea, 2011) and a member of L'Internationale network of museums (M HKA, Antwerp, 2017), which practice experimental institutional and curatorial work.⁴ In this last context I wanted to probe and see this work.

The response to the initial, large-scale *Joyce in Art* exhibition was such that I realised that a combination of contemporary art and literature in exhibition format was something that I had taken for granted, owing to my German background, and that what I called the literary art exhibition still needed to be theorised,⁵ especially for the benefit of the Irish and English cultural field, which was not well represented in the Literary Museums sub-section of ICOM, ICLM. I also realised that the context of the Dublin exhibition, the large ReJoyce 100 festival, was not conducive for many people who attended to detect under the block-buster, canon-celebrating surface (necessary for realising the project financially) what I had considered as a central outcome of the project: that the most valuable reactions to Joyce came not from illustrations to his books, but from the generation of artists who had the writers' complete oeuvre (especially

» 2 See: Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, Victoria Walters (eds.). *Beuysian Legacies in Ireland and Beyond: Art, Culture and Politics*. Series: European Culture and Politics. Münster, Hamburg, Berlin, Vienna, London: LIT 2011, 177-194.

» 3 Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, *Joyce in Art*. F. Senn (introduction), J. Elkins (envoi), E. Bonk (design). Dublin: Lilliput 2004.

» 4 See: www.internationaleonline.org and John Byrne et al (eds), *The Constituent Museum: Constellations of Knowledge, Politics and Mediation, A Generator of Social Change*, Amsterdam: Valiz, L'Internationale 2018.

» 5 Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, "'The Joyce Effect': Joyce in the Visual Arts". *A Companion to James Joyce*. Richard Brown (ed). Malden, Oxford: Blackwell 2007, 318-340. And: Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, "Re-inventing the Literary Exhibition: Exhibiting (Dialogical and Subversive) Art on (James Joyce's) Literature". *Show/Tell: Relationships between Text, Narrative and Image*. Grace Lees-Maffei (ed.). *Working Papers on Design 2* www.herts.ac.uk/artdes1/research/papers/wpdesign/wpdv02/vol2.html ISSN 1470-5516

Finnegans Wake) available during their formative years, such as Joseph Beuys, John Cage, Martha Rosler, Brian O'Doherty, Richard Hamilton and some others. They carried his intellectual and (as they saw it) implied political ambitions into their broadened artistic practices, teaching and instituting – including what one may now call “constituent” exhibitions and museums.⁶

Apart from writing about this constellation of exhibitions, literature and contemporary art, the naturally next step was for me to bring word and image scholars together (organise an IAWIS conference, Belfast 2010, which included W.J.T. Mitchell as keynote lecturer). From this in turn arose a further exhibition: *Convergence: Literary Art Exhibitions*. This “meta” exhibition (Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast, Limerick City Gallery of Art, 2011) accumulated works showing artists' attitudes to (literary) writing, theorised through Friedrich Schiller's emphasis on aesthetic education and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of “minor literature”.⁷ It especially highlighted the liberating potential of artists re-reading certain (canonical but “minor”) literature.⁸ The gallery notes⁹ draw together the history of literary museums and “doubly-gifted” artists, art writing, conceptual writing, the writing of artists doing a PhD – and the potential for (canonical) literature to be taught in the contemporary art gallery. What these notes could not as yet anticipate is the way in which the two reading spaces within the exhibition worked: the artists' publications and catalogues of literary art exhibitions at the beginning and the “primary” literature at the end of the show. Pencil outlines on plinths, with the author and title written in the space served well both to give viewers freedom to handle what was so central to the show and instil a responsibility in them not to let books disappear. It worked.

Responsibility is also a key term in the exhibition *Equilibrium? Royden Rabinowitch: Historical Turning Points and Artists' Solidarity*, which I curated in 2012/13 for the Ulster Museum, Belfast.¹⁰ It was cancelled in the Summer of 2013, two weeks before the opening. Finally,

» 6 See: L'Internationale (as note 4)

» 7 Friedrich Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. 2002, first published 1794. <http://www.searchengine.org.uk/ebooks/55/76.pdf>; Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, transl. Dana Polan, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

» 8 See: Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, “Considering the Minor in the Literary and Photographic Works of Rodney Graham and Tacita Dean”, *Minor Photography: Connecting Deleuze and Guattari to Photography Theory*, M. Bleyen (ed.), Lieven Gevaert Series, vol. 13, Leuven: Leuven UP 2012, 85-102.

» 9 The gallery notes and documentation are available at <https://www.uva.nl/profiel/l/e/c.m.k.e.lerm-hayes/c.m.k.e.lerm-hayes.html> (under publications, professional (*publicaties*, *vakpublicatie*), 2011)

» 10 Documentation is available at <https://www.uva.nl/profiel/l/e/c.m.k.e.lerm-hayes/c.m.k.e.lerm-hayes.html> under publications / academic (*publicaties*, *wetenschappelijk*), 2014.

it was realised at the Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast, which had already hosted *Convergence*, in January 2014. The small exhibition emerged from an invitation of POLITICS Plus (a democratization programme funded by Atlantic Philanthropies) to organize a workshop for elected members of the politicians of the Northern Ireland Assembly. I conceived of the exhibition to be a site for this workshop, in the delivery of which performance artist Alastair MacLennan and I collaborated.

Royden Rabinowitch donated (through me) a *Greased Cone*, a new version of a work he first made in the mid-1960s, to a public collection in Northern Ireland. I discussed with the (few) workshop participants how the human-scaled, rolled steel cone (as symbol of hierarchy) relates to the industrial grease that covers it. It was relevant how placing disgust in the realm of others and not oneself (according to Martha Nussbaum) is the first step in perpetrating violence against the people who are in that way dehumanised.¹¹ In Rabinowitch's sculptural oeuvre, the Greased Cone directly relates to (or addresses) James Joyce (in the form of Constantin Brancusi's *Portrait James Joyce*, 1928).¹² Nussbaum had concluded her remarks on the need of the arts and humanities for democracy with the example of Joyce's affirmative attitude to the body and its chancy aspects at the end of *Ulysses*.¹³ A *Barrel Construction* of Rabinowitch's accompanied the *Greased Cone*: several boards precariously balanced on top of one another and easily knocked over: like the grease, instilling or testing the audience's responsibility for what is fragile but exposed to them without security measures.

This exhibition for Northern Irish politicians is through Joyce (and Social Practice) centrally connected to both the *Joyce in Art* shows and *Convergence: Literary Art Exhibitions*. It again, like the latter, took a meta perspective in a vitrine that drew a large historical line from two displayed volumes of the first edition of Schiller's collected writings (with the *Letters on Aesthetic education* and his inaugural lecture) from the time when the French Revolution's descent into violence had to be understood and cultural responses to this situation formulated. In the vitrine, there were also materials on other gestures of solidarity that artists perceived as the best response to such traumatic historical moments: Beuys in Belfast in 1974, the same, who in the early 1980s partnered up to give the famous *Polentransport* to the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź during the time of Martial Law (which was exhibited in Warsaw when discourses and de-

» 11 M.C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: the intelligence of emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2008, 691.

» 12 See: Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, "Concerning the Work of Royden Rabinowitch: Our Disenchanted Ontology or Paradoxical Hope". *Royden Rabinowitch: Ghent*, Collection Hooft, Gent: MER Paper Kunsthal 2014, 21-36.

» 13 Nussbaum, 709.

monstrations galvanised towards historical change in 1989), and Rabinowitch's donation of the *Greased Cone* to a public collection in Northern Ireland after the 2012 „flag protests”.

The Ulster Museum did not only cancel the show, but also refused the gift. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland acknowledged the letter offering the donation, but did not respond. It is easy to see that the concept of art or exhibitions implicitly put forward here is one that is not congruent with what education in Northern Ireland enables one to understand. (Art provision in secondary schools across the UK has been severely curtailed and there is no art history / theory or similar third level course taught at a university in Northern Ireland). Art (or an exhibition) that makes itself into an uncomfortable presence, a nuisance, appears to reveal anxieties and structures that do not help responsibility or solidarity in a near-seismographic way. That may not be particularly revealing, but, in addition to showing quite unapologetically autonomous work, such an exhibition may establish itself as social fact¹⁴ and enable discourse surrounding the issues raised on a broader level and further afield: it can take on another purpose, reach other audiences, particularly in the academic field – through e.g. an essay such as this. At the time, I had been given a personal professorship (a chair for which I chose the title *Iconology*), but did not have the opportunity to give an inaugural lecture. This exhibition became the alternative format for me to set out what occupied me in research and practice, and where I saw valuable ways for art (history) and curating to make a contribution to both scholarship, public discourse and – maybe, unpredictably – social change.

At the time that the exhibition emerged was cancelled and realised differently, much happened in the broader curatorial field that confirmed my hunch that such conceptions of exhibitions as actors (or a nuisance respectively) was current. Particularly inspiring in this regard was the *Picasso in Palestine* project, 2011, initiated by the Van Abbemuseum's director Charles Esche and Khaled Hourani, artist and director of the International Art Academy, Ramallah, Palestinian Territories.¹⁵ Here, the back-room negotiations surrounding ensuring and transporting a canonical work to a place without clear jurisdiction were as much part of the work as the discourse that led Palestinians at home and abroad to donate considerable funds for showing Picasso's art, instead of taking care of the many other urgent needs, and the Van Abbe's priceless *Head of a Woman*, created in

» 14 Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, London and New York, 2013, 44.

» 15 See: Remco de Blaaij and Els Roelandt (eds), *Picasso in Palestine*, A Prior #22, <http://aprior.schoolofarts.be/pdfs/APM22.pdf>; and: e.g. Slavoj Žižek in conversation about *Picasso in Palestine*, part 1, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3lvYqOVlv4>

1943 in German-occupied Paris effectively and temporarily functioning as a shield for real heads of real women.

It was a particularly gratifying and logical move to offer the homeless Belfast *Greased Cone* to the Van Abbemuseum, which also, in 2017, requested all correspondence and archival materials relating to the exhibition and workshop for politicians in Belfast. The Van Abbemuseum no longer makes a conceptual difference between its collection and its archive (and a case such as this can arguably well illustrate why that would make sense) – and thus little cares whether this exhibition was curated by me, or created (in collaboration with Rabinowitch). I also appreciated that I do not need to decide this. The *Equilibrium?* project also, of course, featured when giving my inaugural lecture at the University of Amsterdam on artists and art historians (and implicitly curators) fruitfully trading places. It is entitled *Writing Art and Creating Back: What Can We Do With Art (History)?*¹⁶ – and in Amsterdam immediately found another curatorially interesting constellation for curatorially “doing something” with art (history): the student protests of 2015 and *Strijd ∞*, an exhibition project that I jointly curated with my students.¹⁷

Rather than describing such further projects, I would like to close with some remarks about the intellectual constellation of the cases that I highlighted here: the interconnecting *Joyce in Art* projects and curating as (or with) social practice in the case of exhibiting Rabinowitch and Beuys for Northern Irish politicians. It is evident for me that the concept of art that (in the West) is broadly still applied and that originated with the Jena Romantics after the French Revolution¹⁸ already spawned (if not maybe directly considered) exhibitions as socio-political actors. Now, the (cultural) nation, for which they fought is close to the opposite of what experimental or acting/activist exhibitions can (or should) today do, but the fact that exhibitions set certain parameters for debate, or influence discourse

» 16 Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, *Writing Art and Creating Back: What Can We Do With Art (History)?* Inaugural lecture 537, Amsterdam: Vossiuspers / Amsterdam University Press 2015 and online: http://www.oratiereeks.nl/upload/pdf/PDF-6174DEF_Oratie_Lerm_WEB.pdf

» 17 Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, Ezra Benus, Tamara Breugelmans, Sepp Eckenhaussen, Astrid Kerchman, Emily Rhodes, Jeroen de Smalen, Frederike Sperling: “Strijd ∞”, [in:] *Aesthetics of Resistance, Pictorial Glossary*, The Nomos of Images, blog of the Minerva Research Project “The Nomos of Images”, Max-Planck-Institute for Art History in Florence, ISSN: 2366-9926, 3 December 2015, URL: <http://nomoi.hypotheses.org/259>; and: Ezra Benus, Tamara Breugelmans, Cristina Buta, Sepp Eckenhaussen, Astrid Kerchman, Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, Emily Rhodes, Jeroen de Smalen, Frederike Sperling, “Strijd ∞, a Performative Exhibition” [in:] *Sztuka i Dokumentacja / Art & Documentation: Art for the sake of democracy*, Lukasz Guzek (ed.), nr. 16 (Spring / Summer 2017), pp. 133-141, http://www.journal.doc.art.pl/pdf16/sid16_strijd.pdf; see also: www.strijdinfinity.com

» 18 See: Osborne. As first orientation: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jena_Romanticism.

and the distribution of the sensible (to speak with Jacques Rancière):¹⁹ this appears to me beyond doubt.

I wish here to sketch this constellation in a way that particularly concerns exhibitions. Aby Warburg, Brian O'Doherty and Harald Szeemann especially need to be added to the sparring partners and interlocutors whom I already mentioned (i.e. Beuys, Joyce, Rabinowitch and others). The enormity of the task of doing their thought and lives' works justice in relation to the place where literature, exhibitions and art(history) meet in socio-politically meaningful (at times explosive) ways is eased by a source that already brings these three thinkers and "curators" together: Roman Kurzmeyer's intellectual biography of Harald Szeemann.²⁰ It would be a pleasure to delve deeper, but that has to remain for another day. Here only the briefest sketch:

Aby Warburg's insights into art as a seismographic tool in analysing the rationality or superstitious or irrational nature of a culture, i.e. the danger or otherwise of a time and place for the potential scapegoats (like artists or Jews like him) was a key point in my early research on the Jewish heritage in the art historian's life and work²¹ – even more so than the now popular *Mnemosyne Atlas* or memory atlas (1920s), which intrigues curators and artists on the basis of Warburg appearing as a "curator" *avant la lettre* (i.e. in the current understanding). Warburg developed an instituting practice, was a systemic thinker, analyst and innovator in the arrangement of his library: these are similarly elements to what a curator (or artist) could today develop.

Brian O'Doherty is (similarly) an institutional worker (National Endowment Programme Director, *Art in America* Editor in Chief and Professor), but particularly institutional critic in this seminal *Inside the White Cube*, as well as exhibition innovator through *Aspen 5+6*, 1967, a "white cube" box that was sent to the subscribers of the magazine as a double issue. It contains high calibre, multi-disciplinary insertions that anyone opening it has to "curate" themselves. An attempt at understanding his multi-disciplinary practice between word and image and institution and institutional critique has been the task that my recent edited book set itself.²²

» 19 See: Rancière, Jacques, *The Politics of Fiction*, http://www.ccs.unibe.ch/unibe/philhist/ccs/content/e6062/e6681/e169238/JacquesRanciereThePoliticsofFiction_ger.pdf [access: October 2018].

» 20 Roman Kurzmeyer, *Zeit des Zeigens: Harald Szeemann, Ausstellungsmacher*, Zurich: Edition Voldemeer, De Gruyter 2019.

» 21 Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, "Das Jüdische Erbe in Aby Warburg's Leben und Werk". *Menora 5: Yearbook for German-Jewish History 1994*. J.H. Schoeps (ed.) Salomon Ludwig Steinheim Institute of German-Jewish History. Munich, Zurich: Serie Piper 1994, 141-169.

» 22 Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes (ed), Brian O'Doherty / *Patrick Ireland: Word, Image and Institutional Critique*, essays by Alexander Alberro, Hans Belting, Patricia Falguières, Thomas McEvilley et al., vis-à-vis series, Amsterdam: Valiz 2017.

Harald Szeemann has made a great and formative impression on me, when I was (as a mere MA student) privileged to contribute to three of the publications accompanying his 1993/94 Beuys retrospective.²³ Researching his oeuvre (for my PhD exam) brought to light his own literary occupations (a PhD on Alfred Jarry), as well as curatorial projects around literature that have directly inspired me (on Victor Hugo and Marquis de Sade). However far removed literary art exhibitions may traditionally be perceived to be situated from artistic and curatorial activism, Szeemann-related “attitudes” can, I felt, take shape (or “become form”) in the constellation between Beuys, Joyce and Szeemann (to borrow the formulation of the latter’s exhibition title “Think in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form”, Bern 1969). Put differently: particularly at times of historical change and where new forms of showing artistic and curatorial solidarity are experienced as necessary, I have become convinced that much valuable work can be done. For me, this has taken place (and will, hopefully, further happen) at the intersection between liberating reading (of literature) in the context of contemporary art, of research in and through word, image and exhibitions, as well as through curating people, objects and institutions into activist constellations.²⁴ ●

- » 23 Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, “Beuys - crise psychique et lecture de Joyce”, *Joseph Beuys*. Harald Szeemann (ed.). Exhib.cat. Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris: Centre Pompidou 1994, 263-265. Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, “Irland”; “Kelten”. *Joseph Beuys*. Harald Szeemann (ed.). Exhib.Cat. Kunsthau Zurich. Zurich: Kunsthau Zurich 1993, 265-66, 268-69 Also: “Celtas”; “Irlanda” (Spanish). [in:] *Joseph Beuys*. Harald Szeemann (ed.). Exhib.cat. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid. Madrid 1994, 246-47, 271-72. Also: “Irland”; “Kelten”. [in:] *Beuysnobiscum*. Harald Szeemann (ed., comment.). Fundus-Serie 147. Amsterdam, Dresden 1997, 202-206, 222-225.
- » 24 Only very recently has one begun to speak of curatorial activism: Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism: Towards an ethics of curating*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2018. I have (separately) explored the ethics of “trans-historical” curating: Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, “An Emerging Ethics of the Transhistorical Exhibition: Beuys, Büchler, Books”, *The Transhistorical Museum: Mapping the Field*, Eva Wittcox, Ann Demeester, Peter Carpreau, Melanie Bühler, Xander Karskens (eds), Amsterdam: Valiz 2018, 118-133.

