

Chus Martínez & Markus Reymann Voices (Towards Other Institutions) #18



Will Benedict. All Bleeding Stops Eventually, 2019, video still. Produced by DIS.
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Below are some extracts from Chus Martínez and Markus Reymann's contribution to Voices (Towards Other Institutions). To listen to the entire audio recording, click below.

The Oceans have Opinions

Markus Reymann

«What is the future responsibility of the cultural institution?»

Chus Martínez

«It's the same as in the past, but with some modifications, I think. Of course it depends if cultural institutions have a collection or not, just to be technical. If they had a collection, then the responsibility and the mission was defined by taking care of the objects, primarily. The objects became a real problem because most of them were, let's say, taken or stolen because of our colonial past. The objects are becoming also very problematized and probably we need to switch that mission into taking care of the people. The definition was to take care of patrimonial goods, and with the patrimonial goods build some sort of memory. That memory was a heritage that configured an idea of identity. So right now the most important thing is social engagement, care, love, social justice. The

question is, can institutions engage with their own audiences instead of engaging only with the objects they exhibit? Is it possible to combine both aspects? Are people at all interested in art? Or are some of the demands so urgent that actually they go beyond the question of exhibition, as we know it till now, and people really want and need first to meet the artists and then to meet the art? These are legitimate questions that are going to affect how institutions evolve in the next decades, I think.»

(...)

Chus Martínez

«We need to take care. There is no other way than to propose, and to be there, and to observe what artists are going to be needing... but also the institutions, which are going to suffer immensely. In many countries, it's very unclear how the entire cultural institutional world, as we know it, is going to survive. And this is an incredible drama, and it has consequences in the quality of life and in the quality of... in the quality of freedom. That is something I am all the time observing, and asking myself how to do it, without just going through a very reactionary, violent period.»

Markus Reymann

«That's such a good question... That's such a difficult question, no? Because the amount of violence that we're witnessing – experiencing it in different ways, clearly – but witnessing, all around... it is tremendously difficult not to get swept up by it.»

Chus Martínez

«Totally. And I think that museums – well, not only museums... I think all sorts of art and collectively activated initiatives by artists and other professionals and other voices, they are there to produce exactly that. A shelter that keeps you away from this violence; that produces a sense that things are still possible; that really nourishes hope... But it's very important to remember that institutions of all kinds, of all natures, dealing with art and artists, are not there to be right or wrong. They are there to activate energies that should contribute positively to a debate, to experience... And to nourish – and this is for me the most important thing – a sense that you are still free as a human. That you can make decisions, that there's still a space, that you are surrounded by people that care about you... so that this constitutes a society. And that therefore you are not alone, and you are not helpless, and that your misery is not only

yours, but we can collectively share that. This is the role of all sorts of institutions as such. I'm not saying that this is the role that artists should play. Artists can be much more specific in their own interest, much more even egoistic, or focusing on what they want. But I'm talking right now about the more institutional performance in the social; and education, also through the senses...»

Markus Reymann

«I think this is exactly it. You're the director of a teaching institution, where I guess your responsibility is exactly this. That the institution provides this space for young artists to be... to have this sense of community, safety, challenge, inspiration, input, and all of that... On the other hand, develop their senses and possibilities to describe and get interested in these specific moments to really zoom in on the detail. I find that exactly in this description that you've just given. It sounded so much to me like the institution where you want to learn.»

Chus Martínez

«Yeah. But also coming to terms with the structures that produce ignorance. Because we are basically shaped by our modern past, and one way of codifying it is understanding that we have been pushed only towards the production of knowledge. And that the production of knowledge is seen as something... is the production of our future, and is the production of light. And that we forgot the many thousands of ways that we produce ignorance and that actually that ignorance is also part of our problem and that we need to embrace that. Otherwise it's very...it's impossible to produce a near-ness to other cultures, to other human beings, with radically different experiences of life. ■ That has been the machinery of science, and the machinery of academies... therefore it's important to pay attention to... to the secret, to the hidden, to the forgotten, to the ways we have been trained not to look at certain parts and trained to look at others. And what does it mean and how does it affect our reaction, and also our negative reactions – like anger, frustration, and so on and so forth. And it's going to be an incredible collective exercise to get rid of frustration, in order to be able to be operative and to help others. And in order to do that, you need to produce systems that are generous, that are able to take pain and to take, yeah, even rage... but still have enough generosity or enough capacity to revert that negative energy into a very

positive one. And give him back an answer that the social slowly is able to take and it soaks in.

And that's something that demands an incredible muscle, because it cannot be done only through programs of exhibitions. It cannot only be done through public programming and talking. It needs a practice that is even more physical, where artists are perhaps responsible for proposing collective exercises and collective experiencing of that reversing of the negative into the positive. And adding that to the functions that we need to implement in the public is a very difficult thing, because we are not trained like that. We are trained really into programming. Programming is what culture... It's like a factory. The whole language, the whole mimicking of the industry has been from the beginning there. And we need to implement tactics or strategies or languages that come from healing, from medicine, from caring... from small communities where people take care of each other, because otherwise they would not survive. So surviving is now an important element of what culture and art need to do. To survive. And you don't survive by keeping on programming, keeping on doing, or just going online, permanently. You survive by just, uh, trying to see a little bit before the drama happens, what you need. And being able to, to kind of assist you into that. And then perhaps it is also shared: it does not feel like an individual problem, but a collective one that... that floats, that still sustains itself.»

(...)

Markus Reymann

«When so much of the current moment is identifying evidences of atrocities of the past – and on ongoing atrocities of the past that are systemically manifest in the current moment – and through that deconstructing the objects that bear witness to this past, and to the perpetuation of this past into the present and into the future... How is it possible to deconstruct or make evident, on the one hand; and at the same time, out of this, create something new, or maybe not new, but different?»

Chus Martínez

«I think it's an incredible question because this is going to be one of the biggest challenges. How to produce a coexistence of the “analytical” and necessary revision of the past – which implies also

dealing with the pain that it causes, and the negative forces that it may unleash.... with the “propositional” and the necessity to actually trust, and move forward, and produce interconnectivity among different communities, which is not based in cynicism or in mutual operative energies and so on and so forth. That’s going to be very demanding, but there is no other way, but to trust and try.» And there is an additional problem with fear, because fear blocks possibilities. People are going to be very afraid of making mistakes, but this is a process that is not possible if we don’t make mistakes. And there needs to be a level of forgiveness and generosity in the mistakes we all made, because our past is of course part of our responsibility, but many of us really want to contribute to a different energy and a different future. But it’s not that we are going to do it free of mistakes tomorrow.»

(...)

Markus Reymann

«There is the identification of what you need, the knowledge of what you need... and then there is an application of something that will help you survive. We’ve been carrying this conversation for nearly three years, and the fabulous thing is that this is not about the solution. It’s about constantly engaging in this process of not knowing.»

Chus Martínez

«Absolutely. We talked about it many times: inventing exercises has been from the beginning of our conversation a big point. I think it’s not about statements, and it’s not only about realizations. To realize something, to become aware, is fundamental. To state it, of course, is fundamental. But it does not necessarily transform your behaviour, or transform the way you feel about it. And to transform your behaviour, you need really an experience – which is a physical experience, an exercise. Traditional art practices have not been about inventing something physically. They have tried to invent it through the mind. So, in that case, the exercise happens in your mind: you imagine it happening, and it belongs to the realm of personal autonomy. You, as an individual, experience something enormous in the presence of an artwork, that can also be described as an exercise of imagination that challenges your life. But now we need to go one step forward. I think now it needs to be even more

obvious, and go not only into the autonomy of the mind, but also it needs to reflect into the possibilities of the body.»

Chus Martínez is a Spanish curator, art historian, and writer. She is currently the director of the Art Institute at the FHNW Academy of Art and Design, Basel, where she also runs the Institute's exhibition space Der Tank. Additionally, Martínez is the artistic director of Ocean Space, Venice, a space spearheaded by TBA21–Academy that promotes ocean literacy, research, and advocacy through the arts. In 2017, Martínez was curator of KölnSkulptur #9. She sits on the advisory boards of numerous international art institutions, including Castello di Rivoli, Turin; De Appel, Amsterdam; Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin; and Museum der Moderne, Salzburg.

Markus Reymann is Director of TBA21–Academy, that he co-founded in 2011, which fosters interdisciplinary dialogue and exchange surrounding the most urgent ecological, social, and economic issues facing our oceans today. Based in London, Reymann has presented on art and the oceans at conferences internationally, including at the 2017 Starmus Festival (Bern), the Explorer's Club (New York City), and the annual UN Climate Change Conference.

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