



Selected Questions & Answers

Attention Economy

16/5 – 9/6 2014

Does art need more public visibility?

Should we assume, as your question does, a current deficit of publicity for art? In some respects this would be very difficult to square with a world where there is a massive expansion of opportunities for the presentation and exhibition of art. Dozens of private museums and foundations are opening all the time and the major public institutions like Tate Modern and MoMA seem to transform themselves every ten years or so. These latter expansions are determined in part by a certain regime of publicity: museums need to constantly expand and reinvent so that the experience of them is new again. (...) Would it not make sense to break the question down a little? For instance, is more publicity good for art? And what kind of publicity do we mean? And what is gained and perhaps more importantly what is lost when art becomes increasingly defined by its publicity?

Mark Lewis (* 1958 in Hamilton, lives in London)

Are there social expectations of art?

Yes, they exist. For instance that art – although it's in a state of economic dependency just like many other things in a capitalist society – should somehow carry inside itself a resistance to these conditions.

Sonia Leimer (* 1977 in Merano, lives in Vienna)

Do you use art magazines as affirmation?

It's been a long time since I have read or consumed any art magazines, because I feel that they are more about constructing trends than objective observation and criticism – although that's not something for which I can really blame the magazines and publishers. The art market behaves in a similar way to the mechanisms of fashion – it's mostly about product placement for the brands (or the artists) and about money or power. He who pays the piper, calls the tune – the magazines describe the works that are being purchased.

Nick Oberthaler (* 1981 in Bad Ischl, lives in Vienna)

Has the reception of art changed in the past years?

Two sides of the same coin: one is the overexpansion and hypermarket driven speculative art consumerism. Mostly the artworks are used as tokens of power, wealth and life style. The other is the reduction of public funds for research, humanities and art institutions. The increase of tough work regulations, insane immigration laws force a lot of artists to interact, produce and exhibit their work only in their local scenes and not to travel. Art is perceived as the endless making of intellectual products, products of taste and control, which circulate only for market purposes. Artists are perceived as precarious workers who don't need to move and have any cultivation of thinking. Instead of making questions they are producing refined answers.

Georgia Sagri (* 1979 in Athens, lives in New York)

Should contemporary art exhibitions be easy to consume?

No, I would rather go to department stores and supermarkets to consume.

Kwan Sheung Chi (* 1980 in Hong Kong, lives in Hong Kong)

What makes a good exhibition?

An exhibition, which takes into account that it's made for an audience, whether it's for a small group of people or a wider one. Any show that attempts to challenge conventions has a greater potential for being a good one.

Michael Elmgreen (* 1961 in Copenhagen) and Ingar Dragset (* 1969 in Trondheim) are based in Berlin/London and have worked together as an artist duo since 1995.

Should exhibitions be informative or entertaining?

Exhibitions should be surprising, sexy, new, unexpected, sudden, impressive, beautiful, kind, lovely, detailed, complex, and above all, it should be something that can't be expressed in words.

Gelatin (four-member artist collective, lives in Vienna)

Why is art so popular?

There is an adaptive advantage to the consumption of novel patterns of information, and humans and animals in general are evolved for this. Naturally, humans seek out experiences that elicit positive feelings once other more pressing concerns are accounted for. Today's peak popularity of art is probably the result of a groundswell of education, a global reduction in poverty and the global reach of the Internet. Each of which allows more people to access the human brain's evolved predispositions towards art. I think an evolutionary framing of art will ultimately prove to be the only tenable framework for discussing art in the long run. It makes no sense to talk about something humans do outside the greater context of the non-human. The "attention economy" began with attention itself billions of years ago. Even bacteria "pay attention" to caloric costs.

Timur Si-Qin (* 1984 in Berlin, lives in Berlin)

Do you feel that contemporary art has gained increasing popularity?

Yes, I do think that contemporary art has gained in popularity. The amount of visitors has also become an increasingly important factor in the evaluation of many museums and monster events like biennials and other overview shows, so some people have been interested in providing better access to contemporary art.

Mathilde ter Heijne (* 1969 in Strasbourg, lives in Berlin)

What kind of political values does art incorporate?

Luckily, art is not automatically bound to rational and efficiency-oriented goals. So there's the possibility of mental freedom and utopian thinking (ideally speaking).

Anna Witt (* 1981 in Wasserburg am Inn, lives in Vienna)

Do we need new spaces for contemporary art?

It seems so. We need to see whether the existing system of exhibition spaces is in line with current requirements and artworks, or whether this could, or should, be revised. The hierarchical structures that still exist, for instance, are very outmoded and above all uninteresting – change is needed there.

Cäcilia Brown (* 1983 in Sens, lives in Vienna)

Has the art world become more global?

The art world has become more global, in the same way that power has become more global. Power doesn't have a fixed address anymore, so the constraints of geography over this are not so important. The location of power is irrelevant, what matters is the speed with which it moves through temporary obstacles.

Julieta Aranda (* 1975 in Mexico City, lives in Berlin)