Stedelijk Studies Issue #5: Curating the Collection

Deadline: May 27, 2016

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Theme: Curating the Collection - Strategies of Presentation in the Twenty-First-Century Museum

THEME OUTLINE:

In early 2017 the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam will re-install its collection, creating a semi-permanent and cross-disciplinary presentation of highlights in the lower-level gallery. Moreover, the ground floor will be dedicated to research-driven collection presentations under the title “Collection in Action”. Influenced by contemporary information technology and visual culture, the public is increasingly focused on the links between different works of art and their relation to current social and political issues. The museum sees it as a challenge to explore these new connections. These new approaches fit into the growing tendency of re-thinking permanent collections – the subject of this volume of Stedelijk Studies.

In 2000, Tate Modern shook the museum world with the groundbreaking and controversial installation of its permanent collection, arranged according to theme rather than the more commonplace chronology. At the same time, the Museum of Modern Art in New York began to research a possible future non-chronological presentation of its holdings. Still more recently, with the installation of with Modernités plurielles (2013-2015), the Centre Pompidou took the bold step of attempting to write with its permanent collection the history of twentieth-century Modernism as a global phenomenon. This project fit with the museum’s policy of updating the installation of its collection on a regular basis, instituted in 2005.

These are just a few examples of the ways in which over the last decade and a half museums have been re-thinking – and reinstalling – their permanent collections. Of course, one has to keep in mind that throughout their history, museum installations have always been under reconsideration. However, influenced by the critical discourses that began to shake up art history in the 1970s, as well as by institutional critique from artists, in recent years museums have become a focal point of cultural debate. Moreover, under pressure from state and local governments to valorize their holdings through visitor numbers and inclusivity, collection curators have been reconceiving their displays in order to create new understandings of (the history of) art. Ideas developed in the field of exhibition and biennial curating since the 1980s have played an important part in this process, as has the notion of “narrativity,” which has become an ever-stronger guiding principle and seemingly inescapable force in museum presentation. Today it seems no museum would dare display its collection without seeking to tell some kind of story. But whose story is it, and why does it now seem impossible to present works in a “non-narrated” or unmediated fashion?

In the context of the Stedelijk Museum's ambitious project of reinstalling its significant collection in the fall/winter of 2016/2017, it is the aim of this volume of Stedelijk Studies to explore not only the physical manifestation of these developments, for example in the form of case studies, but above all to look at their wider implications: Do these changing narratives affect our ideas about art, the art historical canon and our idea of what a collection actually is? Do they have the potential to transform our concept of the role and function of museums, and if so: how? Do continuously shifting stories offer new insights, or are they merely another manifestation of the museum industry's pursuit of ever-increasing visitor numbers? Or, worse yet, are they a means of justifying to neo-liberal management and government the expense of keeping permanent collections open to the public? And: are there already signs of resistance to these practices?

Suggested topics may include, but are by no means limited to:

The 'collection exhibition' (promoting the collection through temporary presentations):
- Typology of strategies: thematic, mixed object categories, transhistorical, transnational, transcultural, global, revitalization through authorial interventions ('curatorial turn') or insertions, revitalization through artists' intervention
- Changing displays and their effect on meaning
- Relationship between these new practices and the discourses of art history since the 1980s (revisionism, post-modernism, alternative modernisms)
- Influence of curatorial practices originating outside the museum sector (e.g. biennials, exhibitions, Szeemann, Fuchs, etc., the 'experience model')
- The collection as brand and branding tool

Historical context:
- Influence of past museological practices (e.g. Wilhelm von Bode, Alexander Dorner, Alfred Barr Jr., André Malraux, Lina Bo Bardi)
- Influence of the history of the collection – its strengths and weaknesses – on the presentation strategies

Case studies:
- Case studies of museums of modern and contemporary art (e.g. Stedelijk MuseumVan Abbe Museum, Centre Pompidou, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Tate Modern's extension)
- Case studies of other (non-art, non-modern) museums, especially regarding the combination of art and other object categories, or the combination of historical and modern art (e.g. Dahlem, Humboldt Lab – Probebühne, Van Gogh Museum, Louvre Lens, Museum of World Cultures)

Practices:
- Educational aspects: new types of writing and storytelling, new media
- Influence of architectural choices on the installation and presentation
- Physical aspects: lighting, vitrines, wall treatments, routing
- Scale and new media as detrimental to the presentation – what happens to the collection when you can only show one big work at a time?

The theme issue Curating the Collection will be edited and curated by dr. Rachel Esner and dr. Fieke Konijn.

Stedelijk Studies is a high quality peer-reviewed academic journal, which publishes research related to the collection and on institutional history of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, museum studies (such as education and conservation practice) and current topics in the field of visual arts and design.

SUBMISSION:

Please submit your abstract before May 27, 2016.

Deadline for the essay will be September 1, 2016.

Stedelijk Studies accepts both solicited and unsolicited texts for consideration on a rolling basis throughout the year. Prior to developing a complete manuscript authors are asked to submit an abstract (300 words max.) with short bio (150 words max.) and 3-5 key bibliographic sources to the editors who will make a preliminary decision regarding the topic's relevance to the journal's aims and scope and will provide suggestions for developing the manuscript.

Manuscripts and manuscript proposals as well as abstracts and other editorial correspondence should be sent to:

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Reference:

CFP: Stedelijk Studies Issue #5: Curating the Collection. In: ArtHist.net, Apr 14, 2016 (accessed Nov 20, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/12717>.