

FIVE ART CURATORS CONSIDER TRANSFORMING AN INTERIOR

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A sense of community has long since left both the location and this group. It is the last site visit of the day.

The old disused beer factory lies behind the palace. It is the size of several extensive bus depots placed side by side. Birds fly in and out of its broken safety glass windows. A swallow darts through the slats above the door to its nest. A huge chain, compete with piratanical hook, hangs from the ceiling. Broken ladders extend down walls, leading to nowhere. Cavernous pits, spaced regularly across the floor, are full of fluorescent green algae. Rusty water lies stagnant in the shallower puddles. Low brick walls zigzag through the rubble. Massive funnels lie obsolete. Green moss has taken hold in places.

“The owners, they don’t ask for money, and God knows we don’t have money, but I can transform it all.” Romano is the leader of the group for no other reason than this is the way he sees it.

Irme tries to overlook Romano’s use of ‘I’. Surely he should remember that they have been brought together from different countries by the Festival organisers to work as a symbolic group for this project.

“I think it is very fruitful and beautiful,” Irme begins, “to transform the insides further into nature. To cleanse the pools.... to grow the grass.... to transform the industrial interior. Herbs with flowers.... smell, aroma. Mmmmm, we can produce dry herbs for cooking. We can grow an orangerie.”

“The space should be filled with balloons,” trills Romano. He claps twice, expansively, and a wood pigeon ricochets from cover.

“Or with sound? Let the sound bring hope and transformation to this building,” Florence Bids chimes in.

Irme looks to John, who has, yet again, been quiet. She allows him the space to respond.

John’s mind is blank. He is not used to working with others. He likes to present a finished idea and certainly does not ordinarily arrive at any kind of understanding through conversation.

Irme’s generosity to allow others space has its limits. She begins again. “Have you seen Sergio’s most recent work? You do know the work of Sergio Langoné?” Florence Bids, Noli and Romano nod automatically. John looks non-committal.

“His latest body of performative work is based on how the monks used to stand in water at night to focus their faith and ensure a clear channel of prayer to their god. He would love this stagnant water. So indicative of the faith issues of today.”

“Sergio’s between Berlin and New York just now. Are there any local artists we can think of?” asked Noli.

“No travels expenses there then,” said John wryly. The group looks at him aghast. He notes that his humour does not translate.

“No John. Their work would bring tectonic form to our enterprise, and identify why here, why now, what makes this city’s scene different from another.” Noli spoke to John as if he were a small bewildered child or the director of a confused institute.

<Ring tone>

Romano reaches in his black leather jacket pocket, and walks away importantly from the group. “Allo? Ah Pepe, what does the MCAA say to my proposal?”

Someone has to get things back on track whilst Romano multi-tasks. “Let us trust in each other’s ideas to gain mutual understanding.” Florence Bids looks gravely around the group. “Let us see our task as devotional labour.”

“Yes, you can work for eternity these days,” Irme sighs heavily, in this post-industrial building. Her court shoes are beginning to kill.



"This place is not accessible to the audience. We need to find an alternative." Noli has been systematically scanning the venue for fire escapes and ramps whilst the others have kept to their creative discussions. She can only see staircases into voids.

"But seriously, when the alternative space stops, what is the alternative?" Florence Bids asks earnestly. The group feels depressed. They no longer enjoy curatorial conversation. They only have two days to come up with the perfect venue that meets with their yet to be formed collaborative vision.

"How about that unfinished building we saw yesterday?" John is now desperate to conclude and leave.

Noli theoretically agrees. "I guess it now seems indicative of the state of large areas of this city. It makes for a crude reflection on reality."

"Yet, in its state of flux, it can look both ways, to past and future. An accordion edit of time, where one can stretch into the other," Irme ventures.

"We can create something new in this moment, this incomplete architecture. The building demands it. Something that cannot be influenced by current trends." John feels hopeful for the first time.

"Should artists reflect our epoch though?" Romano, who had rejoined the group, looks unconvinced. He is still thinking of the balloons in this factory's vast volume. The balloons' cleanliness, their lightness versus the heaviness of past industry. Such a poetic juxtaposition packs punch. It would make a great image in Art Forum. Romano likes visibility.

"Mmmmmm, interesting. The artist as revolutionary, the artist as creator. Is it their role to comment on the system, or to teach or to rebel? I like it," says Irme.

"Whatever happens, whatever choice we make, we must have faith in the artists. They know exactly what they do," Florence Bids says firmly.

"What do we do?" asks John, somewhat sarcastically.

"Make our decision on the venue, go back to the organisers to assess what negotiations we must make, then discuss our rationale for selection, approach the artists," Noli goes through her

mental checklist as it flips into its normal rhythm.

"No, I mean, what is it we do as the curator?" John continues, less pedantically. "We have discussed the possible role of the artist, but what is the role of the curator? Are we questioning our own epoch? Are we the puritans of contemporary art? Are we instrumental in our mediations between the parties of organisations, artists and audiences? Are we co-creators with artists? Or arbiters of our own taste and ego through prioritising our original premises over art production? What are the new ways we can make connections between people, ideas and place?"

"John has a point. We have the chance here to listen to languages which are otherwise inaccessible to us as individuals. What is beyond us," Irme reaches towards the sea of rational and irrational thought which flexes and whips itself.

"Let's use this opportunity to question the dominant mode," Florence Bids ascertains that the group has revived. "Let's break apart the things we know."

"A kind of expanded curating," Noli surmises.

"Expanded curating," Romano mentally notes. He likes it. He can use that phrase as a great sound bite in his next presentation to international peers on his methodologies relating to curating. It could become as popular as other zeitgeist terms in this relatively young industry. It has been useful to come to this backwater after all.

The group shuffles out to the silver people carrier which will take them back to the boutique hotel. Hopefully they will have an hour as individuals before they have to meet again at dinner.

Around them, the world is turning. The world is still turning.

