

Introduction

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A few revelations of curatorial strategies

“The curator must be flexible. Sometimes it acts as a server; others, of assistant; sometimes offers artists ideas about how to present their work; he is coordinator in the collective exhibitions and inventor in the themes. But, in the curating, what really matters is doing things with enthusiasm, with love, and something obsessively”¹. The above words were spoken in 1995 by Harald Szeemann, one of the unquestioned stars of curating, who thus tried to define the role of an independent curator. A few years later, Jarosław Suchan, Director of the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, drawing attention to the museum context emphasised that: “A curator in a museum is someone situated between a work of art or another text of culture and a recipient, someone tasked with ensuring that a reaction between the two occurs so that the work, in short, works. The point is not to explain the meaning of the work, but to give the curator a feeling that what he or she sees can be important to him or her for some reason”².

These two quotations map out a space filled with various curatorial activities. The questions regarding their specific characteristics, tasks, goals, and strategies remain open. When we look at the literature on curating, it quickly turns out that there is no single definition of curating and that the issues discussed in its context are becoming more and more extensive. Therefore, although there is still no curating textbook and on the other hand more and more publications come out focused on this issue, we have decided to invite authors to reflect on curating, its strategies, problems, and areas of activity in *Zeszyty Artystyczne*. We were eager to get the answers to the above questions especially because in 2015 we established the first Polish study field in Curating and Theories of Art at the Faculty of Artistic Education of the Poznań University of Arts (currently the Faculty of Artistic Education and Curating). Previously, stu-

» 1 An interview with H. Szeemann by Hans Ulrich Obrist, in: H. U.Obrist, *Krótką historia kuratorstwa*, transł. M. Nowicka, Korporacja ha!art, Kraków 2016, p. 106.

» 2 An interview with J. Suchan by Karolina Sikorska, in: *Zawód: kurator*, ed. M. Kosińska, K. Sikorska, A. Czaban, Galeria Miejska Arsenał, Poznań 2014, p. 106.

dents could specialise in curatorship in the field of visual arts when studying Artistic Education. Some of our graduates are already active and experienced curators. We are convinced that art nowadays cannot exist without curatorial practices. However, we are still reflecting on what curatorship exactly involves: taking care of art, critical practice, research practice, promotion of art, creation of its image, or perhaps artistic practice. Perhaps, it is an activity that combines all of the above activities?

The texts collected in the 35th issue of *Zeszyty Artystyczne* answer questions concerning curatorial practices related to the presentation of contemporary art in galleries and museums, but also in places not related to art, as well as strategies of curating exhibitions related to architecture, literature or new media. Who is the exhibition curator today and what is his/her role in contemporary culture? Is s/he still a guardian of artists or rather a demiurge (she-demiurge?) building their own images of art? Attempts to respond to our reflections have been made in the texts published in *Zeszyty*. Sometimes the questions were addressed directly, at other times they were only subtly or slickly signalled.

It is worth noting that the authors are mostly people with curatorial experience; some directly invoke their own practice. This is precisely what we, as the editors of the volume, wanted to accomplish. In the literature on the subject, personal statements often have the character of conversations/interviews; we deliberately gave up this form in favour of personal and thematised statements. We are gladdened by the presence of authors from outside Poland. It turns out that we read similar texts and ask similar questions, answering them in our idiosyncratic ways, e.g. taking into account the geographical context (as emphasized by Barel Madra).

All the collected articles were divided into two equal groups: four offer a critical examination of the motifs rooted in the history of art, both avant-garde and contemporary one, and the other four are based on personal experiences. However, very often the problems raised in all the texts overlap, correspond to and supplement one another.

The articles make up an interesting mosaic arranged around several key issues: the social and political involvement of curating, experimenting and broadening the experience of the audiences, involvement in the multidimensional reality, the responsibility of the curator with the awareness of the need to specify or define it.

Of major importance in this issue of *Zeszyty Artystyczne* are the texts related to the history of art and exhibition practice. In his text "Parodying (Case of Curatorial Strategies of Kazimir Malevich)", Beniamino Foschini refers to the art of Kazimir Malevich, and more exactly to his parodistic strategy during the exhibition of e.g. his own works. Apart from an interesting angle on the history of the avant-garde, the text addresses the

currently topical issue of combining the roles of artist and curator. Can an artist be a good curator? Can these two activities be separated from each other? Mateusz Bieczyński in his article “White Cube and the art market. Are white walls really so innocent?” addresses the question of the white cube in the economic context (of the art market), in the political context and in reference to copyright law. The author maps out a history of emergence of this particular strategy of the presentation of art.

Historical references were supplemented with more recent examples of selected curatorial strategies. In his text “Revisions of experimental institutionalism in the context of socio-economic transformations after 2000 (a case study of the project *Once Is Nothing* by Charles Esche and Maria Hlavajova)”, Arkadiusz Półtorak refers to the project by Charles Esche and Maria Hlavajova to provide a critical analysis of experimental institutionalism. Ewa Wójtowicz’s article “‘Technical Difficulties’. Curatorial challenges resulting from the presence of new media in the art of the 20th and 21st centuries” raises the issue of the curatorship of new media, looking especially at unique technical aspects and related failures.

The above texts continuously if covertly pose questions about the position and role of the curator. The same can be said about the four other, very personal texts. In her text “Art exhibitions and civic education – case studies of own selected curatorial concepts”, Izabela Kowalczyk looks at the exhibitions where she had tried to informally educate about the civil society. Invoking Jacques Rancière’s theory of division of visibility, the author reflects on her own curatorial responsibility towards the recipient, indicating as follows: “In order for the exhibition to be a part of the process of civic education, arouse emotions and provoke discussion and critical reflection, it should first of all show the relations between art and the contemporary world, our life and important problems of the contemporary world. In such a case, it is not possible for the audience to remain indifferent to it”. As readers, we can wonder if the author/curator has managed to accomplish her goals in the projects discussed.

The question of responsibility is likewise addressed by Beral Madra “(... the Curator Has his Own Evolution. Curating through the Post-truth)”. The author introduces one more topic of post-truth, of major importance today. Referring to her own experiences, the author points to the centre-periphery relation and the development of art circulation, marking the presence and absence of artists in the global context. The responsibility of the curatorial choices themselves is strongly politically-oriented.

The other two texts extend the scope of curatorship outside that of visual arts, proving that at present we cannot restrain curatorial practice solely to the field of narrowly-construed art. Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes in her article “Literary Art Exhibitions and Artist’ and Curators’ Solidarity”

riety in Times of Historical Change” invokes her own extensive, relevant experience and asks questions about the role of culture, in particular of language, in the creation of a socio-political community. At the same time she asks questions about the museum of literature and its roles and about the interrelations and influences between visual arts and literature. Ariana Pradal in her text “Welcome. Come on in! To Plan a Multi-layered and Plurivocal Exhibition – Illustrated by Three Practical Examples” addresses the curatorship of architectural projects. She describes three examples of her own projects in reference to Mike Ball’s concept of exhibition impact (“Exhibition as film”). She comes up with the proposal of an exhibition as a stroll, whose pace, route and perspective are decided upon by the recipient him – or herself. of special interest are the places of particular projects, which are always an integral part of the exhibitions, such as cable car stations or abandoned churches in Zurich. “A good exhibition is like a musical composition, a film or a theatre performance. It takes me on a journey and tells me a story. As a curator, I partly work as a playwright or a director. I ask myself the question: how to present the theme of the exhibition in the introduction? Where to place the climaxes and where to place the zones of peace and quiet? How to say goodbye to the visitors at the end of the exhibition? What kind of knowledge and emotions should they take with them?” These questions are asked by Pradal at the beginning of her text in order to show us the practical application of these principles.

The above curatorial deliberations are supplemented by two original texts-commentaries to the exhibitions related to the Faculty of Artistic Education and Curating. Rafał Łubowski shares with the readers his work on the Versus exhibition, presenting the works of selected artists associated with the Interdisciplinary Department of the Faculty of Education and Curating. Paulina Brelińska describes her WEAiK graduation project – *Voyager’s Record/Rejestr podróżnika*; it consisted of two parts - a real one (presentation in Skala Gallery) and a virtual one (an online exhibition made in the Research Catalogue design tool).

The 35th issue of *Zeszyty Artystyczne*, despite raising multiple themes and issues, does not exhaust the topic of contemporary curatorial strategies. It shows that curating questions are extremely diverse and open, and at the same time points to the social roots of these practices. The current issue of *Zeszyty* is an intellectual stimulus for discussion, which must remain aware of history and be open to contemporary multi-faceted activities. ●

