

Discursive exhibition

Tags

#Discursivity

#Discursive artworks

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#New Institutionalism

Discursivity is one of the key forms in the contemporary art world and production. Discursive practices such as lectures, presentations, discussions, talks, workshops, conferences, symposiums etc. have for a long time been considered as side programs or another public program of exhibitions, often serving as additional means to deepen the topic of research in the presented collection of artworks. But in recent years the 'discursive turn' in contemporary art happened when the discursive took center stage not only in practice as an art form but also in the frames on the institutions (New Institutionalism) and curating¹. The interest in presenting thinking and discussion rather than artefacts can also be contextualized in relation to the discourse-based artistic practices preceding the shift in exhibition-making, such as in the late 1960s and early 1970s movement of conceptual art².

Mick Wilson writes that the turn to the discursive has been noted in recent work in the field of contemporary art or that "since Conceptualism's reception of Austin's "How to do things with words" the productive powers of language have been part of the stock assumptions of a wide range of experimental art practices and attendant commentary". According to him this is a "tendency that has been given further impetus by the Foucauldian moment in art of the last two decades, and the ubiquitous appeal of the term "discourse" as a word to conjure and perform power"³.

So besides the interest in discursive as an artform (lecture- presentation; performative lecture or dialogical practices) and as a strategy of the new type of institution or live institutions that are fluid and negotiable entities that develop with time and that besides exhibition spaces have also education, research and community departments, the exhibition itself can be regarded as a discursive space.

Bruce Ferguson claims these 'discursive exhibitions' mark the arrival of a new genre, particularly in biennial culture, that tends towards 'exhibiting discursivity' and 'the engagement of the audience in listening, reading, studying, or participating rather than merely looking.'⁴

¹ Eszter Lázár, Discursivity in <http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/discursivity/>

² Rethinking the Biennial MPhil By Project by Marieke van Hal in <https://researchonline.rca.ac.uk/1350/1/VAN%20HAL%20Marieke%20Thesis.pdf>

³ Mick Wilson. 2007 Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns. In Paul O'Neill ed. 2007 Curating Subjects. London-Amsterdam: Open Editions -de Appel. 2007: 201-216

⁴ Maria Aroni, The Aesthetics of Curating: Exhibition-making after the Conceptual Turn, A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) London 2017, Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture Kingston University <https://eprints.kingston.ac.uk/id/eprint/39276/>
For further reading: Ferguson, Bruce W. and Milena M. Hoegsberg, 'Talking and Thinking About Biennials: The Potential of Discursivity', in Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø, eds, The Biennial Reader (Bergen and Ostfildern: Bergen Kunsthalle and Hatje Cantz, 2010), pp. 360-375

The discursive exhibition can be regarded in two ways. The first includes artworks that are discursive per se and with language being their central medium, the second being that the exhibition is of a discursive format in which the actual display of artworks is part of a much broader project of research and knowledge production⁵.

In the first case, sometimes the discursive art works are as the strategy of leftist, anti-globalist, and feminist art groups, criticizing the art market and the white cube⁶ and in the second case it is accompanied by a whole set of documents, research and materials that complement the art works (not necessarily of a discursive nature and not necessarily artworks in the classical sense) and give an extra dimension to the exhibition itself.

In both cases they “evolve over time and instead of prioritizing the moment of display, or the event of the exhibition, they allow for open-ended, accumulative processes of engagement”⁷.

Examples:

100 Days-100 Guests, program for Documenta 10 in 1997 curated by Catherine David
https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_x

Five platforms consisting of lectures and discussions for Documenta 11 in 2002, curated by Okwui Enwezor <https://www.documenta12.de/archiv/d11/data/english/index.html>

Riwaq Biennials consisting of curated visits, conversations and interactions <https://www.riwaq.org/>

Taipei Biennial 2010, curated by Hongjohn Lin and Tirdad Zolghadr
<https://www.taipeibiennial.org/2010/en/tb2010.html>

The 28th São Paulo Biennial curated by Ivo Mesquita and Ana Paula Cohen in 2008
<http://www.bienal.org.br/exposicoes/28bienal>

Anonymous is the answer, National Gallery of the Republic of North Macedonia <http://akto-fru.org/en/1703-2/>

Other Scale of Things, Museum of contemporary art, Skopje <http://akto-fru.org/en/exhibition-other-scale-of-things-curated-by-ivana-vaseva/>

Ivana Vaseva

⁵ The two exhibitions “Anonymous is the answer” in the National gallery of the Republic of North Macedonia and “Other scale of things” in the Museum of contemporary art in Skopje, curated by Ivana Vaseva, are intended to be of a discursive format More on:
<http://www.inthepauseofagesturetheremightbeanecho.eu/index.php/en/22-titlescat/52-other-scale-of-things>

⁶ Eszter Lázár, Discursivity in <http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/discursivity/>

⁷ Paul O'Neill, Claire Doherty (eds.), Locating the Producers Durational Approaches to Public Art, Valiz Antennae, Amsterdam, 2011, p.14

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in

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