

Fia: For his publication, Matt Keegan is having different artists talk to one another. I asked you, even though you are a writer, since your role has become less clear, because you were in the artist Josh Smith's show, exhibiting a draft of your doctoral thesis.

Bettina: If one exhibits a thesis, does one become an artist?

**F:** I don't think so. I don't think that I became a gallerist, even though I did a few shows here in my space last year.

**B:** Oh, yeah; you can't think of me as an artist.

**F:** No, I don't think so, and I don't think that I am a gallerist, either. It seems that the crossover is hard to understand.

**B:** You were always an artist, right?

**F:** Yes.

**B:** Thus, you were acting in another cultural role, but you remained an artist.

**F:** Many people think of what I did as a gallery, and of me as a gallerist. In America, the vocabulary is so shrunken when it comes to alternative actions. Nobody says 'independent space', or any of that.

**B:** What did you show last year?

**F:** I did four shows before this; they were much more 'curated' shows, in the traditional sense. But I always put pieces of mine in the show, which is something you are not supposed to do. I thought it was important as some sort of kick-off, or reference point.

**B:** In this show 'Blonde Revolution' your work is not simply placed into the scene, it is not simply the yellow stripe on the wall that envelops the entire space, rather, it seems that the whole show has become an installation by you, in fact the majority of the images are inserted by you. Was that the case with the other shows?

**F:** No, it was not. In the first one I did, my participation

was a color, which covered this whole wall; for the others they were all kind of concealed or toned down. This was the first one which was the opposite.

**B:** All your images in this show are appropriations: manipulated and appropriated images.

**F:** When artist Kelley Walker walked in, he said, "you've treated the artists like readymades," which I had, the Duchampian gesture to choose, or 'appropriation as curating'. It all comes back to the idea of an artist who curates. In defense, this current piece makes it harder to separate my work and the other work, it becomes like a parasitic act.

**B:** So, it all becomes your piece.

**F:** Exactly. I act as a parasite in relation to these artists. Before the division was much more clear. I think there are a couple of artists who work like this, the parasitic way. I don't know if you can call it curating with parasite art.

**B:** Who were you thinking of?

**F:** Something that I was thinking about a lot this summer was Rirkrit Tiravanija's piece, The Utopia Station, in Venice. It was first of all a parasitic situation, because Carsten Höller removed all the other artists' names.

**B:** Carsten Höller did that?

**F:** That was his contribution, so Rirkrit clearly becomes the name that remains.

**B:** That's interesting that Carsten did that, instead of Rirkrit.

**F:** Yes, of course, Carsten gets the signature for removing it for Rirkrit. And that's the problem, I think. It felt kind of irritating in that show because people who were in The Utopia Station got kind of wiped out looking for...

**B:** I didn't go to Venice that year, and was only exposed to its press coverage, basically, and the announcement, but when I think of Utopia Station, what stuck in my mind is the list of people who were part of it, not only artists but also curators and writers, who are part of a loose group and a 1990s generation. To think of The Utopia Station is to think of Hans Ulrich Obrist, Molly Nesbit and Rirkrit Tiravanija as initiators and composers. The other people had a less active roll or a less controlling role, but they were all part of The Utopia Station in my memory, so I don't think an erasure took place.

**F:** That is kind of nice. I guess after everything and the way the architecture was set up I don't know what difference name tags or no name tags would have made. But I like that you say they were like composers or conductors.

**B:** It was all so atmospheric, and so much the moment of a particular group... It's a moment which has passed, but which they are trying to catch or recreate, if possible. It's really something that we place in the nineties, and

which, now that this group is older and many of them are more established artists, they are still trying to go back to, a moment when things were more utopian, maybe more idealistic, when they were younger, ten years ago when they all first met and started to do things. I had the feeling it was a lot about these questions of how can we stay young, how can we stay alive? How can we use this venue of the biennial to escape the pressure to make a work of art placed in the space? Can we create something else, which is more meaningful to us? That's why the group element is so important to me, and, at the same time, the removal of the name tag makes sense: even though works are created, a certain work leads to another work, which leads to another work, which is happening within one person's development of their artistic practice, but it's all so very much one moment in a discourse, or one particular way of spending time and meeting in certain spaces. It's about the recreation of the space, very much a social space.

**F:** So for example what Rirkrit did in the Secession in Vienna (View), which I have only seen in images, have you seen it?

**B:** No, I haven't.

**F:** He recreated the skeleton of a villa by Los Angeles architect Rudolf Schindler; he recreated it with chrome scaffolding. Then he filled the space with other artists' work.

**B:** Filling a structure with other artist's work means that you really only offer a structure, which can be an architectural structure, a social space, or an institutional space. It can even lead to a book or a critique or writing, so that as a structure it is many things, but the content is not by you. You just act—that is what you propose—as a curator or a parasite.

**F:** I don't think it is as simple as a division between a structure and insertion of content. The structure may be the content! The alien work may be formal or material elements, a support for something else to occur, to exist. There is also *Moment Ginza* by Dominic Gonzales Forester. Have you seen it?

**B:** What is it?

**F:** She provided a space and a huge wall that stretched across an entire space, this was up in Stockholm - I am relying on images here. All of the people participated on or around this wall, which was architecturally a big structure, also using sound and special lights. She had other people be part of it.

**B:** I don't know that work of hers. It sounds almost like a graffiti wall.

**F:** Something like that. In this way, she has accomplished a structure of the whole, a kind of scaffolding.

**B:** But that's just one way of curating. I'm trying to think

of a curator who is not an artist who has done something like this, or if this is inherently a way that artists curate. I guess Hans Ulrich Obrist comes to mind. He is the same generation, and a key initiator of ideas of that generation, someone who has created all different sorts of structures: fictitious venues, or real but temporary venues, venues which have similarities to the projects by Rirkrit and Dominique.

**F:** What about artists who curate in a more conventional sense of the word; for example, the show at Champion Fine Art, curated by Mai-Thu Perret with work by Valentin Carron, Gardar Eide Einarsson, Fabrice Gygi and Alex Morrison?

**B:** Unfortunately, I haven't seen it. Everything we talk about I haven't seen. It's a great conversation based on imagination.

**F:** You make everything up!

**B:** Right, I never go and see things; I just sit at my desk and read and write.

**F:** Everybody else can tell you about all of these things. You know how a CEO operates at a big corporation, who gets briefed by people about what's going on. Can you think of an example of other artists who curate?

**B:** When artists curate, it often happens in an informal way, based on a loose circle of friends, friends in the sense of other artists, the people that you meet because you look at the same things, or you look at each others work and you cross over, you talk... The event often takes place within a small social circle, and then it's over. These small shows, as you say, "curated by artists", often happen without much of a trace, because the institution is missing, or is explicitly not a part of it. So either you were there, or it remains a rumor. I think those may happen all the time. In Vancouver, say, with a small but very intense group of artists; I suspect that it must happen there, but it could be anywhere, really.

**F:** People generally say that shows curated by artists are more interesting or more involved, but then one cannot discredit a whole profession, of course.

**B:** Well, I guess there is a certain fear or worry, mixed with hope, of course, that artists have about curators. There are so many curators now who feel very entitled very fast, and it's also such a way of life. Maybe because artists usually are slower, I think, than curators; theirs is simply a slower practice. You don't really achieve things fast, necessarily, and I think curators, by comparison, are faster. So the slow artist meets the fast curator, and the artist is afraid of, you know, a mess... So much can happen to your work; it can really be misrepresented. But that doesn't discount all the really good curators. Part of being a good curator is to respond to the work of others rather than simply taking it. That doesn't mean there

is not a vision, but I think it's another impulse, another starting point. I think many of the new—I am just going to call them “The New Curators”—see it differently, and I think they are endangering people's work, sometimes. I've heard artists talk about tricks, about how they might make a work that cannot be destroyed by a curator, by misrepresentation, because the work is so, um, it's somnambulistic, and it's so smart in itself that it can't be broken through misplacement or the wrong context... it's interesting that artists are trying to work against this kind of curating.

**F:** As if curators were hackers, to make a hack-proof piece. It's really crazy this new kind of curating and their education. They study briefly in some institution...

**B:** I guess traditionally a curator would have studied something from the humanities, or maybe art.

**F:** And would have written about art.

**B:** Yeah, and then slowly gotten to know what an organization is, or how to organize people.

**F:** But now you only have a year of curatorial studies and then you're set to go.

**B:** You learn how to curate before having embraced any other materials or knowledge. That seems to be the absolute flaw.

**F:** But curators who come with an art history background are usually the worst?

**B:** I thought that.

**F:** But I would think the opposite; I always want them to be more knowledgeable in art history.

**B:** I don't think they have to be. If you have studied anything seriously—it could be math or chemistry, it could be art or philosophy, it doesn't really matter—If you have studied something and you have come to the conclusion “I would like to curate”, that can only be good. Better than to be eighteen and think “I want to curate and therefore I am going to learn how to curate”.

**F:** “I am going to make it my career.”

**B:** I just think art history cannot be a guarantee of becoming a good curator.

**F:** No.

**B:** Art history seems like it could be quite useful, but...

**F:** It is good to know what exhibitions have been done, or how people have been thinking about art, what has been going on for centuries. Someone called this show I did perverse, because it used the tools of a certain kind of exhibition logic of minority shows and an eighties rhetoric, but to opposite ends, counter productively. Anyhow, the Surrealist exhibitions, the one in which Duchamp worked with the golden measurements...

**B:** ...with all the strings...

**F:** Yes, with all the strings as a kind of overarching scaffolding. I don't think he 'curate-curated' that but he

sort of 'organize-curated' that one.

**B:** Yeah, because the work was so hard to see. That is quite some organization!

**F:** An interference.

**B:** I think you don't necessarily hear about this if you study art history, but if you are interested in seeing exhibitions, and you go to see them, then you are exposed to things. A long time ago when I started to study, I'd tell a friend of mine, a neurologist who started to collect art when very young, about things I read or heard about, and he seemed to always already know more than I did. He was obviously some years older than me, so I thought how long must I study to catch up with his knowledge? But it was that he was simply a connoisseur; he loved the material and spent time with it.

**F:** I was wondering about the distinction between the curator and the artists, when this distinction occurred, or was it always there? I think the curator is fairly new as a profession.

**B:** Well the first museum of modern art was founded in 1929. So at that moment you start to have a curator that works with living artists; until then, I think, the work that was shown was usually by dead artists. You could go back to the producers of major historical artists, like the court or the Vatican, but I guess you would never speak of the relationship as a curatorial one, in today's meaning of the word, it was more a relationship of a patron, and based on commissions.

**F:** But there is an element of choice in that, so it could be a curatorship. They still chose who and what work, and determined what 'good quality' was: “I like this, place this in the church back there.” They acted as judges of taste.

**B:** It was much less pluralistic, but there was still the element of choice, this, however, expanded during the last century, and many people can now make decisions about what is shown, and therefore a great many little things are shown.

**F:** Should the distinction between the curator and the artist be rethought in some way or another? For example, you say that Hans Ulrich Obrist works similarly to the way Rirkrit works.

**B:** But it is usually a question of personality. Not everyone is able to create certain contexts or to create certain relationships with artists. So I think to universally change the relationship between the curator and the artists is impossible.

**F:** I mean that some curators may make art and vice versa.

**B:** I think there always will be that. And it will always be originality and vision that change the classic definition of professional roles or cultural roles, because these

definitions are just habits, they are not absolutes. But I don't think that would be new - it always happens, although it is always rare.

**F:** What do you mean by people jumping between professions?

**B:** I think if someone has a vision, in any field, they usually go beyond the traditional definition or limitation of a profession or discipline.

**F:** Going back then again to the Surrealists, they can afford to label themselves as Surrealist and when you read about who's a Surrealist, it says he was a surrealist and an author, he was a surrealist and an anthropologist or whatever it is. But the Surrealist label points out the area of interest or ideology or way of reacting to the world. That is hard core top-level labeling they put on themselves. But now let's go back to the Obrist/Rirkrit question. It seems like they don't want to have that labeling, which is one of the reasons they don't have it.

**B:** Their label is their name, they want it to be stronger than...

**F:** Personal name, they don't want to be any group.

**B:** No, I think they want to be a group.

**F:** But invisibly.

**B:** They want to be identified with a group, but they want the group to be identified mainly with their name, rather than going under in the group and being identified with another name that stands for the group. This group doesn't have a name like 'Surrealism', this group is just kind of a group from the nineties, and the same five or ten names are always part of this.

**F:** What should we label it, the Euroists? Do you think that is good?

**B:** The Euroists? But Rirkrit is the son of a diplomat, and has lived all over the place. (laughter) The Privileged?

**F:** That's good. But, I don't know, there are so many different ways of attacking curating. Someone who places objects in space, sets up the architecture, or makes the choices, a judge of taste, thematic theoretician, a statement writer etc. there are so many ways of being an artist too.

**B:** Well, I feel like I have always sensed the potential, and also simply the desire, of some curators to be artists, because they long for the freedom of the artist...

In the sense that they, too, are spending their time with creative work, rather than simply being an organizer or manager, which feels too restricting. Everyone wants to explore forms, or contents, or contexts, which have not been explored yet... maybe by resorting to the idea of the curator as artist they can enable themselves more to do that. The traditional definition of the curator is to take care of material, and the curator-Warren Niesluchowski wrote this great definition of the curator-I wish I had read

it before I came, because he goes back to the original meaning curare, which means to cultivate the earth, it basically comes from farming, farming in the sense of taking care of the earth to prepare for the next harvest or generation.

**F:** It's really funny, in Sweden before the word and practice of curating came into the country in the nineties, you would call them the exhibition commissary. It's like a detective or a hired police, a kind of exhibition police, and then when the term curator starts to come into Sweden, there is a problem, because when you are in high school or when you are between thirteen and eighteen years old, there is this person who works in the school who is a “curator”, and she takes care of you if you have a psychological or social problem, you have to go and see her if you come late to class or the like. That's the curator.

**B:** Yeah, someone who takes care of something.

**F:** Exactly, but they are delinquent teenagers in this case. Then the word was connected to the art world; it took some time.

**B:** It is always the crop for the next season: you take care of education and school children, their psychological needs as well as their knowledge and imagination, or you take care of crops, actual crops, farming for the next season.

**F:** Artists who curate take care of their legacy, the idea of archiving yourself into the proper context. A lot of this going on.

**B:** Very Duchampian: you write your own history.

**F:** For artists who curate, you put yourself in the context where you want to be. Whereas a curator doesn't really think in these kinds of terms.

**B:** I guess not, but they also want to find their own signature and write their own history, even if they place themselves in that history, although not as an artist. I think you always try to create constellations that you find interesting, even if you don't put yourself into it, and as a creator you are somewhat part of it.

**F:** I guess art is not a finite thing.

**B:** It never is. It can always become something else by the way it is shown. There is never a final definition of what is Duchamp's Large Glass, the work just continues. So you can obviously do damage to the material, as well as put it into all different kinds of angles or lights to see how rich they are-- or not, because there is a lot of bad art, too.

**F:** Thinking about archiving things...

**B:** But archiving... Exhibitions are usually temporary, so you are lucky if you have a well-done catalogue, because nothing else remains for the archive. Also maybe criticism, but really the book would be the one

element to document something that doesn't last. But usually exhibitions print 1000 to 3000 copies of a catalogue, so it's almost like an edition.

**F:** You had to be there.

**B:** You make a few hundred copies or just sixty. But for me the archive is something that stands for really long duration, an archive of thousands of years of discourse.

Most of what is made is lost because there are strict criteria about what enters this long-standing archive, because there is not enough room for too many things. So even if you put it on the web and you give out the Blonde Manifestos. How many copies did you make, fifty?

**F:** One hundred.

**B:** One hundred. So, if you look at history, it is so slim, the chance to enter history. I am only saying this because you introduced the term archive, and archive for me is a term that stands for immortality.

**F:** But I also think in a sense that it stands for a tradition you want to enter into.

**B:** Yeah, looking back at the archive, it's like a heritage.

**F:** That is what it is, but you can enter into the tradition in many different ways, I think, not only via the archive to eternity, but by relating to it and claiming it. I know I am obsessed with the Surrealists today, by the way they created their own tradition.

**B:** Oh yeah, everyone creates their own story. But the Surrealists also managed to enter the archive and remain, and many of the documents are still accessible to the public in different ways: libraries, museums, web sites, books, and these are two different things that are linked. The archive is an amazing thing, because it's there for anyone, it's not exclusive, anyone can claim it, review it, get familiar with things in it, but not just anyone can enter it herself, in the sense of leaving something that will last; that is a whole different issue, as with the Surrealists, who managed to become part of it and not only to relate to it.

**F:** But then there is the thing about power roles that we haven't really mentioned: these new curators, they also have a lot of power, and they have a say who is going to enter the archive or not, which the artist usually has very little power to do or say.

**B:** I think it is true that curators sometimes gain power really fast, but at the same time I think time will show.

**F:** It was really interesting in Nicholas Bourriaud's book *Post Production*, in the way he relates to new modes of cultural production when he mentions all these new fashionable professions, such as web programmers, and I think he mentions the DJ. I think the stylists also could fall into this.

**B:** Absolutely.

**F:** All of these professions have the Duchamp gesture of

choosing, which is like a stylist's gesture.

**B:** But, I think with the readymade, it is not just the pointing of the finger at something and choosing it- although it may be the first gesture of the ready-made-it is also the way that it is placed. Duchamp took care of the way the fountain was photographed in a certain way, and of being written about in a certain way, in a publication which he published himself, *The Blind Man*. He controlled the whole context of commentary and documentation of the piece, which itself was lost. So, he already set mediation as a key artistic element, and it is the mediation that he puts into play himself.

**F:** Of course you have to choose something first, but I think that the mediation may be more important in the end than the selecting. In choosing pieces for readymades, you already have a lot of significations that come into play. With Duchamp's gesture you have to take into consideration, he didn't make 235,000 readymades, he only needed to 'make' very few to make his point. They then mediated between each other as well. Only selecting is about taste. The drive behind the stylist in the end is taste: that these pants look good with this shirt.

**B:** Yeah.

**F:** There again you have the choices: choose this, choose that, to be good at putting things together. It is about now, now, something fashionable.

**B:** Yeah, this could be a badly misunderstood echo of the nineties. If you treat culture as purely visual, and therefore flat, and you leave out history and theoretical discourse, only entertainment remains.

**F:** A new form of entertainment. You have to have the stylist's way of vision or gaze.

**B:** Yeah, but exclusively visual, visual without any further implications.

**F:** And also some kind of social network.

**B:** It is a network and a taste, and taste is fine, but not by itself.

**F:** Yeah, what is that?

**B:** Pink looks good with red.

**F:** There is much more to pink than that.