HOST AND AMBASSADOR: A CONVERSATION WITH YASMIL RAYMOND

Curator, Dia Art Foundation, New York

BY LATITUDES

Photo: Stephanie Berger

#OpenCurating
Yasmil Raymond

01 ˙ Trisha Brown Dance Company, *Early Works* Performance view at Dia:Beacon
Photo: Stephanie Berger

YASMIL RAYMOND HAS BEEN THE CURATOR OF DIA ART Foundation in New York since 2009. Previously, between 2004–9, she worked at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. At Dia she has organised exhibitions and projects with artists including Jean-Luc Moulène, Yvonne Rainer, Ian Wilson, Robert Whitman, Koo Jeong A, Franz Erhard Walther and Trisha Brown. She is currently working on the retrospective *Carl Andre: Sculpture as Place, 1958–2010*, due to open in May 2014, as well as on *Gramsci Monument*, a project by Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn that begins this July.

The following text is a transcription of a conversation between Raymond and Latitudes that took place on 19 February 2013 at the auditorium of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), as the public event of Latitudes' *#OpenCurating* research. The conversation begins with an overview of this research, followed by a brief introduction to Dia and its projects since 1974. It incorporates "crowd-sourced" questions that were received via Twitter and Facebook, including from Raymond's current and former work colleagues, and concludes with questions from the audience.

Latitudes: Good evening everybody. This conversation with Yasmil Raymond forms part of *#OpenCurating*, the research project which we initiated last summer. Previous conversations have taken form over email, with various agents: curators, artists, researchers, and so on. The origin of the research goes back to 2009 and the editorial project we realised in the context of *The Last Newspaper* exhibition at the New Museum in New York. This was an exhibition about news, the format of the newspaper and how artists respond to the headlines. We started researching in particular about the changes taking place in journalism, especially those affecting print media. *The Guardian* newspaper was one of the leaders in defining what those changes were and we were intrigued by their use of the term "Open Journalism", writing its "theory" and framework. So to explain it briefly, the idea is that an editor acknowledges that he or she cannot have full knowledge and opens up a dialogue with the reader. The reader can openly comment, share sources and contribute to the news; it becomes a continuous process, which turns

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Yasmil Raymond

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from a monologue to a dialogue. We were interested in this shift in production. There is a passage from an article in *The Economist* titled "The people formerly known as the audience" that is very relevant:

> Thanks to the rise of social media, news is no longer gathered exclusively by reporters and turned into a story but emerges from an ecosystem in which journalists, sources, readers and viewers exchange information. The change began around 1999, when blogging tools first became widely available... The result was "the shift of the tools of production to the people formerly known as the audience" [Jay Rosen]... This was followed by a further shift: the rise of "horizontal media" that made it quick and easy for anyone to share links (via Facebook or Twitter, for example) with large numbers of people without the involvement of a traditional media organization. In other words, people can collectively act as a broadcast network... The role of journalists in this new world is to add value to the conversation by providing reporting, context, analysis, verification and debunking, and by making available tools and platforms that allow people to participate. All this requires journalists to admit that they do not have a monopoly on wisdom.*

* "The people formerly known as the audience" *The Economist* 7 June 2007

So we began to wonder how journalistic participation – participation being something that has become highly contested in the art world in recent years – and this idea of not having the monopoly on wisdom might be translated into contemporary art and curating. So we have routed our *#OpenCurating* research through Open Journalism and our experience with *The Last Newspaper.* It also considers more generally how Web 2.0, and the use of Facebook, Twitter, etc., might be changing art practice and how museums and curators are responding to these changes. How are collections and large institutions generating a conversation and opening up to dialogue? How do you deal with a desire for interactivity and with a world which seems to demand transparency, not just in the art world, but also in political terms? Are curators admitting they do not have the monopoly of wisdom?

It's important to mention that the research has not been focused directly on internet technology, but instead looks at the changes in behaviour that have emerged within

02 *The Last Newspaper* ed. Latitudes New Museum, New York (exhibition 6 October 2010–9 January 2011) Design by Chad Kloepfer & Joel Stillman

curatorial practice because of it.

The *#OpenCurating* research itself is taking the form of ten interviews, which we conduct, edit and design. They're published online in the form on PDFs downloadable from our website as well as the publishing platform Issuu. We have also been trying to lead discussion over Twitter, but perhaps that has not been as successful as we had hoped. Just to mention two of the interviews, "Itinerarios Transversales" ["Transversal Itineraries"] was with Sònia López, Head of Web and Digital Publications here at MACBA, and Anna Ramos who coordinates MACBA's online Ràdio Web MACBA, which includes an incredible archive of over 250 podcasts. We were interested in the shift that took place with the launch of the new MACBA website a year ago, in particular new tools such as "Recorridos" ["Itineraries"], which allows users to pick up content, works in the collection, or archive media such as videos, artist biographies, publications, etc., to create their own itinerary though the collection. The sixth interview was with Steven ten Thije, research curator from the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven and was titled "From One History to a Plurality of Histories". This discussed, among other things, the four-part project *Play Van Abbe*, which looked closely into how collections can be re-articulated. Steven talked about exhibitions as a collection of communicating "nodes" and about rethinking the function of the museum within a community.

This evening we're going to be incorporating questions for Yasmil which we've gathered, "crowd-sourced", from Facebook, Twitter, and over email, both from her current and past colleagues, as well as from followers of the project. But first of all let's run through a quick five-minute history of Dia, if that is at all possible.

It is fair to say that the history of Minimalism, Conceptual art and Land Art would not be the same without Dia. Its collection counts on over 700 works by a relatively small number of artists, forty artists, including just to name a few – Joseph Beuys, Walter De Maria, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Blinky Palermo, Cy Twombly, Andy Warhol, Michael Heizer, Robert Irwin, On Kawara, Sol LeWitt, Agnes Martin, and it goes on, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, Lawrence Weiner. Many people will

03 Dia:Beacon
Riggio Galleries, 2002
Photo: Michael Govan
© Dia Art Foundation

perhaps best know the Dia:Chelsea phase of activities from 1987–2004, but the present main facilities opened in 2003 in this incredible former Nabisco factory now known as Dia:Beacon in upstate New York by the side of the Hudson river. It specialises, as Dia always has, in long-term installations, and comprises galleries specifically designed for single works, such as Andy Warhol's *Shadows* [1978–9]. Dia:Beacon alone is twice the size of MoMA, but you have a tiny staff comparatively speaking. And that is one of the many unique things about Dia. Also under the Dia umbrella comes the stewardship and preservation of some of the most renowned art sites of our time in the form of *Spiral Jetty* [1970] by Robert Smithson in the Great Salt Lake in Utah, Walter De Maria's *The Lightning Field* [1977] in New Mexico, as well as permanent works in New York like De Maria's *The Broken Kilometer* from

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1979 and his "Earth Room" [*The New York Earth Room*] from 1977; [Joseph] Beuys's *7000 Oaks*, the Dan Flavin Art Institute in a former fire station in Bridgehampton, and we could go on, it's an embarrassment of riches. Dia started out as effectively a private and personal collection in 1974, run by Philippa de Menil, Heiner Friedrich and Helen Winkler. Initially the stated aim as written in its first report was to "plan, realise and maintain public projects of artists... which cannot be easily produced, financed or owned by individual collectors because of their cost and magnitude".* In the early 1990s Dia became a public institution and entered its second phase with the opening of the Dia:Chelsea space, which as we mentioned was the main site of activities until 2004.

* Quoted in Anna C. Chave "Revaluing Minimalism: patronage, aura, and place", *The Art Bulletin* Vol. 90, No. 3 September 2008

So what we'd like to do throughout this conversation is to go back and forth between this amazing legacy, your work since 2009, and well as future plans. Yasmil's work since 2009 has included a three-part project with Koo Jeong A [*Constellation Congress*, 2010–11], Franz Erhard Walther's *Work As Action* [2010–12], and Jean-Luc Moulène's *Opus + One* which ran for a year from December 2011. Robert Whitman's *Passport* in April 2011 was one of several performative works; there has been a particular emphasis on performance and dance. There was a year-long series of performances by the Trisha Brown Dance Company which took place amongst the installations at Dia:Beacon in 2009 and 2010, and similarly *Yvonne Rainer*, which took place over three weekends in 2011 and 2012.

So this finally brings us to the first question, from Doryun Chong – Associate Curator, Painting and Sculpture at MoMA in New York – a former colleague of Yasmil from the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Are you ready? Doryun asks, "How does an institution solidly based in a particular style mostly from the 1960s and 1970s deal with the art of the present?"

Yasmil Raymond: Hello everybody, it's a pleasure to be here. I'll try to jump right in. All institutions that have a collection have the issue of history. The legacy of history from the 1960s and 1970s in particularly heavy for contemporary art. One could say that it is our avant-garde – it's not like the Russian avant-garde, or Dada, or even

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Marcel Duchamp – it's our avant-garde and some of those artists are still living with us. And that would make anybody shake in their pants! I would say that there is a level of awareness that I try to keep in mind through the fact that many of the artists in the collection live right in the city where I work – they're very much living artists who one must respect. When I arrived at Dia in 2009, I immediately wanted to acknowledge that by introducing myself to them and also by going through the institution's history to see if we have any "accounts" to settle with any of them. Which we did. Franz Erhard Walther is living in Fulda in Germany and was a teacher in Hamburg for about forty years. His work *First Work Set* [*1. Werksatz* (*First Work Set*), 1963–69] was acquired by Dia in 1978, yet it was put in storage and had never been shown. I felt it was my responsibility to acknowledge that and to go and meet him and to figure out how the work was incomplete, and if we could, finish it and present it. This was within a month of me starting work. So that is one immediate example of how I have tried to acknowledge the past.

When I'm working with an artist like Trisha Brown or Yvonne Rainer I am acknowledging the evident fact that the avant-garde in the 1960s was not only composed of movements in the visual arts, but that this time was also extremely important for the opening of the borders between disciplines. Yvonne Rainer was collaborating with Robert Morris, someone like Trisha Brown was influential

04 "Latitudes in conversation with Yasmil Raymond" 19 February 2013 Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) Photo: Joan Morey

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05 Yvonne Rainer
Assisted Living: Good Sports 2, 2011
Performance at Dia:Beacon, Riggio Galleries. Performers: Patricia Catterson (held), Patricia Hoffbauer, Keith Sabado, Joel Reynolds, Emmanuèlle Phuon, Emily Coates and Yvonne Rainer. Courtesy Dia Art Foundation, New York
Photo: © Paula Court

to Donald Judd and vice-versa. I actually have to thank MACBA in this respect. I had been working within a very multidisciplinary programme at the Walker Art Center, an institution that doesn't believe in the hierarchies of disciplines – it has a visual arts department, a powerful publications and graphic design department, a performance department, a film department. Yet MACBA's amazing show *A Theatre Without Theatre* made a very big impact on me – I actually didn't see it here but in the Museu Colecção Berardo in Lisbon – in that it confirmed for me the conversations we had been having at the Walker about the importance, for example, of the collaborations of Merce Cunningham, of Nam June Paik, the importance of the Situationist International, of Provo in Amsterdam.

L: Let's go back to Franz Erhard Walther again because of his interest in participation in this interdisciplinary context. Dia's focus has always been on artists – on enabling artists and their vision – rather than on audience or the public, which perhaps since the 1990s has been the preferred emphasis of large art institutions. What is

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intriguing about your project with Walther is that as you mentioned, you were "retrieving" this work from the 1960s. Perhaps you could talk about how reaching back to this historical work actually might help Dia itself define a contemporary position towards participation?

YR: Well, I don't want to say that it was anything too revolutionary, but there are a lot of rules which institutions set for themselves, and one of the big rules at Dia, I guess everywhere, was that you don't touch art. At the beginning there was a lot of resistance to Walther's project from the conservator at the time, to using the original work rather than replicas. I was arguing that we should trust the guards and the gallery assistants, and that I would train them. I had worked recently with Tino Sehgal, who is a believer in human beings, and I'm a believer too. I thought it could be worked out, and that if it became a problem, we could close it, bring it to an end – after all it is our work and we can decide whatever we want. The first step was to convince the artist. He had obviously done this work throughout the 1960s, which was a very differ-

06 Franz Erhard Walther, *Positionen*, 1969. *Franz Erhard Walther: Work as Action*, Dia:Beacon, Riggio Galleries. 2 October 2010–13 February 2012. Courtesy Dia Art Foundation, New York Photo: Paula Court

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ent period, yet he had been present, doing what he called "demonstrations" of the work. I explained to him what I wanted to do and suggested that if he could come to install the work he could train the gallery assistants, telling them how to talk to the public about the work. And if he didn't like how they were doing it, we could fix it and make it better. So there was a process of a lot of conversations with the artist and the staff. It was as if you had to speak from the stomach to the visitors, you had to be very confident, "now we're going to open this", "when you're done, you're going to fold it back like this", you had to be very direct. It was very important to use the originals. I'm a little suspicious of the exhibition copies, it's not that I was fetishistic about the originals, but that I felt the copies deprived the audience of the colour and richness of the materials. The copies were khaki colour, but when I opened the crates and found ours were in beautiful reds, greens and browns, I realised that colour was really a part of the piece. The other thing to mention was that I thought using the originals put quite some pressure on the staff, so it would have to be voluntary. Some guards didn't want to do it, and

07 Franz Erhard Walther *Kopf Leib Glieder*, 1967 *Franz Erhard Walther: Work as Action,* Dia:Beacon Riggio Galleries 2 October 2010–13 February 2012. Courtesy Dia Art Foundation, New York. Photo: Paula Court

they did not have to. We also set up a system where the guards could email me without having to use their names. They wrote a diary, a journal of their experiences. If something strange happened or if something really amazing happened, they could write about it. So over time we got to understand that maybe we could open up who we were allowing to use the works, maybe teenagers were okay, but the visitors had to be old enough to understand what was happening, little children could be too rough with the materials, so we monitored and changed according to the behaviour. We would get comments such as how women were much better at folding the material! We learned and this lasted for two years. And nothing was damaged.

L: A two-year-long exhibition is an extraordinary thing for most museums. Yet talking of the long-term and slowness, *The Lightning Field* of De Maria is only open six months of the year, only six people can experience the work each time, you have to stay overnight – an amazing experience of time and quite a commitment. It is a stupid comparison, yet on Twitter statements effectively expire within a few minutes. The point is, do you feel too slow as an institution in a social sphere in which everything seems to be about acceleration? Or as one of our contributing questioners Yoeri Meessen [Art Mediator; Head of Education at Manifesta 9] would like to ask, "If the question of space is central to curating, what about time?"

"The 'Dia way' is that there are no clocks and no calendars, it's more like science fiction."

YR: Well, the "Dia way" is that there are no clocks and no calendars, it's more like science fiction. I'm the same age as *The Lightning Field*, which is a bit scary, it's been running as long as I've been on planet Earth. I'm not just saying this as I work for Dia, but if you have a chance to go to *The Lightning Field*, then go. There is still that aspect of pilgrimage as with many things with Dia. You have to do some penitence and get on an airplane, go for three hours in a car, meet and stranger who is going to drive you for another hour. You'll arrive at a cabin and you're going to be left there with food – and potential lightening. It is quite extraordinary. I think time is very precious; people haven chosen to invest their time differently. Museums and galleries have invented this rule of the one-month exhibition, or the three-month exhibition. This was never a given, it came out of a desire to generate capital and

entertainment, and to keep an audience seduced. In a way Dia is not very good on the seduction part, but it's a long-term relationship. Similarly, the "Earth Room" has been there for thirty-five years. Obviously we cannot keep Jean-Luc Moulène's exhibition up for quite the same amount of time, but he's part of a different programme, one that lasts one year. One year is still a big and unusual commitment for an artist.

L: Has there been discussion about commissioning further work that lasts for a much longer time?

YR: There are enormous desires! Yes. But it's a question of being able to have enormous funds available. We have many ideas, it's just that we would need a lot of money and enormous generosity! A project like the "Earth Room" sustains itself because there is the money to pay the rent of the property and to pay its employee, and that will hopefully be paid for eternity.

L: Dia has this great tradition of slowness, but it was also one of the very first art institutions to commission works for the web, starting in 1995 and continuing today, over thirty projects. Most recently there has been Shannon Ebner's *Language is Wild* [2012], an interactive sequence of stills that makes different combinations of text and image according to various mouse clicks. Sue Tompkins's *My Kind of Book* [2011] is a manuscript in the form of a web-based book which the artist reads. What's noticeable about the Web Projects is that many of them are animation-based or film-based, Flash or other file downloads. They're not especially open to the web. Given that the way the internet functions has obviously changed vastly since 1995, how do you currently approach commissioning for such a "medium"?

YR: This is a tricky one. If you look at one of the early projects like Francis Alÿs's *The Thief* [1999], it was a screensaver, I'm not sure if anyone actually uses a screensaver anymore. The Web Projects show the development of technology over time in the early days, and then there is a break when we couldn't catch up with the resources that you would need to, for example, hire a great computer engineer. But we're not aiming at that. The principle that Lynne Cooke initiated – Lynne was the curator at Dia for seventeen years before me – was to invite artists who

did not particularly work with technology. It would be a medium largely unknown to them.

L: In the context of *#OpenCurating* it's too perfect not to mention another of the early Web Projects, in fact it was only the second commission, in 1995 – Komar + Melamid's *The Most Wanted Paintings*. Dia hosted a poll on its website as an extension of the artists' project to create various countries' "most wanted" and "least wanted" paintings – in this case to try and create the "Web's Most Wanted" and the "Web's Least Wanted". Dia also produced a CD with the artists resulting from a web survey to find the "most wanted" and "least wanted" music. The latter resulted in twenty-five minutes of bagpipes and accordion!

It's interesting to look back on this now in the context of a number of "crowd-curated" exhibitions such as the Brooklyn Museum's *Click!* in 2008 that was based on web visitors voting for works they wanted to see, as well as a general increase in the "have your say!", or "what do you

08 "The Web: Most Wanted Painting", Screen grab from awp.diaart.org/km/web/most.html
Komar + Melamid
The Most Wanted Paintings
Artist's Web Project
Launched 9 May 1995
"People's Choice", 1994–7
Konrad + Melamid Archive

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think?" kind of language in art museums. What's your opinion on this prescient project now? Obviously Komar + Melamid were critiquing the whole idea of popular art, a nation's art, or people's art; somehow Markus Miessen's book title *The Nightmare of Participation* springs to mind!

YR: Well, I saw the Van Abbemuseum project that you've discussed in the previous interview with Steven ten Thije, in which visitors were asked which work they would like to see from the collection. This is going to sound condescending but I'll say it anyway. When your museum is in a provincial place like Eindhoven or Minneapolis, you know that your visitors are around eighty-five percent neighbours, the audience of the institution is largely maintained by locals. In those cases those kind of experiments maybe are more productive because they show how far away an international museum's understanding can be from the taste of the audience – although taste is a concept I'm not particularly interested in. The polls might give you facts, and you could make some generalisations, but it would be a pity to base your mission on these facts that just come from your neighbours. It would narrow everything down to the degree that you'd only be working with local artists. If we'd go back to being localist or nationalist, then I'd be the first one out. I'm not interested in that: I'm very happy with our century of globalisation and I love the idea that I can be country-less, nation-less. I would like to believe that one day we would not need borders or passports. I'm more interested in the idea of good neighbours who might not only be within walking distance – far away neighbours, coexistence rather than locality.

In Dia's case such a thing would not work, in any case we have seventy-five percent of our collection on display. So people would probably say "my favourite is already on view"...

L: ...and it has been for thirty-five years!

Here is a question related to the Web Projects, from Sarah Hromack, Head of Digital Media at the Whitney Museum of American Art. She tweeted, "Tell us more about [Laylah] Ali's upcoming web project, 'John Brown Road?' Future plans re: digital pubs?" Dia is well known for its scholarly publications in print form, and I imagine Sarah is curious as to how you might be taking that forward

beyond paper, or into different modes of distribution. And how much can you reveal about Laylah Ali's project?
YR: Well I'm afraid I can't really say anything about it, I'm sworn to secrecy. You'll have to see it in June! About publications, we have a new manager of publications who came from Parkett Publishers, Jeremy Sigler, and he is really enthusiastic about doing some publications digitally. We'll be learning from Paul Chan's Badlands Unlimited, as well as from MACBA which is among the leaders in a strategy of releasing scholarly essays as PDF publications. At the Walker we made the publication for the *Abstract Resistance* exhibition "on demand" at $9.99 via Lulu.com.
L: Related to this, how do you see Dia's digital relationship with its archival material? Is the archive public?
YR: Dia has an enormous archive, but no, it's not public. We have to catalogue the whole thing, digitise it, build a library for it, and we know that once that material is available my job will change because I will be able to share this with others.
L: In the context of a public museum, there is a need to be transparent, in the case of the Van Abbemuseum again, it belongs to the city. Some previous directors of Van Abbe kept absolutely everything, even little notes to the guards, they are all there in the archive. This forms a history of an institution as much as the art does.
YR: Yes, for me it's very important to keep every note from an artist, floor plans, and so on. And you need an archivist! We've determined that it will take five years to get the Dia archive into order. For me it is towards the top of the to-do list, to get the archive together, funded and available, but it's not such a sexy thing to fundraise for.
L: Something that interests us a great deal is the idea of the exhibition as an interface or a technology between the "back end" of a collection or an archive and the public. Both holdings of art works and archives can tell a particular kind of story...
YR: It would be amazing for this to be online, for people to be able to read the contract between Walter De Maria and Dia from 1974, the lawsuit from Donald Judd...
L: Dia co-founder Heiner Friedrich has said, "I have nothing to say about works of art, they speak for themselves, very clearly and very powerfully."* That is quite a

challenge to maintain in today's institutional context in which everything is much more geared towards interpretation and education, towards the paper trail, what lies behind the story of an artwork. Traditionally the publication has been the place where this kind of thing would be "revealed", or where the critic would make commentary. One of the things we've been trying to address with this research is exactly how this traditional model of exhibition–catalogue–audience is being broken apart by different technologies...

YR: I know that artists don't like to tell people what is important or how you should look at their work. A statement such as Heiner Friedrich's assumes that the only experience of art is the experiential, that it is an encounter with the sublime. That is only one way to answer the question of what is the experience of art. I don't vote for a one-sided view and I feel that there are multiple ways of entering art: some people are cerebral, some prefer reading or to investigate social contexts, or political contexts, or logistical contexts. Some people might be as interested in the facts of Dia's buying of the apartment for *The Broken Kilometer*, the whole administration of a real-estate location in Manhattan, as in the actual tonnes of earth there. The experience of art is far more plural that just the sublime or formal reading.

L: We have another question from a former colleague, Richard Flood [now Director of Special Projects and Curator at Large, New Museum, New York]. "How do you define your relationship with an artist you are working on an exhibition with?" I think he is hinting at your amazing capacity for forming very close friendships with the artists that you work with, for the amount of personal time that you invest. Perhaps you could address the question by talking about your project with Koo Jeong A which took place in 2010 at the Hispanic Society of America on 155th Street as well as at Dia:Beacon and the Dan Flavin Art Institute in Bridgehampton?

YR: Another difficult question. I first trained as a painter in Chicago, so I spent some time and energy trying to be an artist before working in museums. So maybe it is from that experience that my approach to working with an artist is always in a supporting role. Anthony Huberman runs

* Quoted in Calvin Tomkins "The Mission" *The New Yorker* 19 May 2003

"I don't vote for a one-sided view and I feel that there are multiple ways of entering art: some people are cerebral, some prefer reading or to investigate social contexts, or political contexts, or logistical contexts."

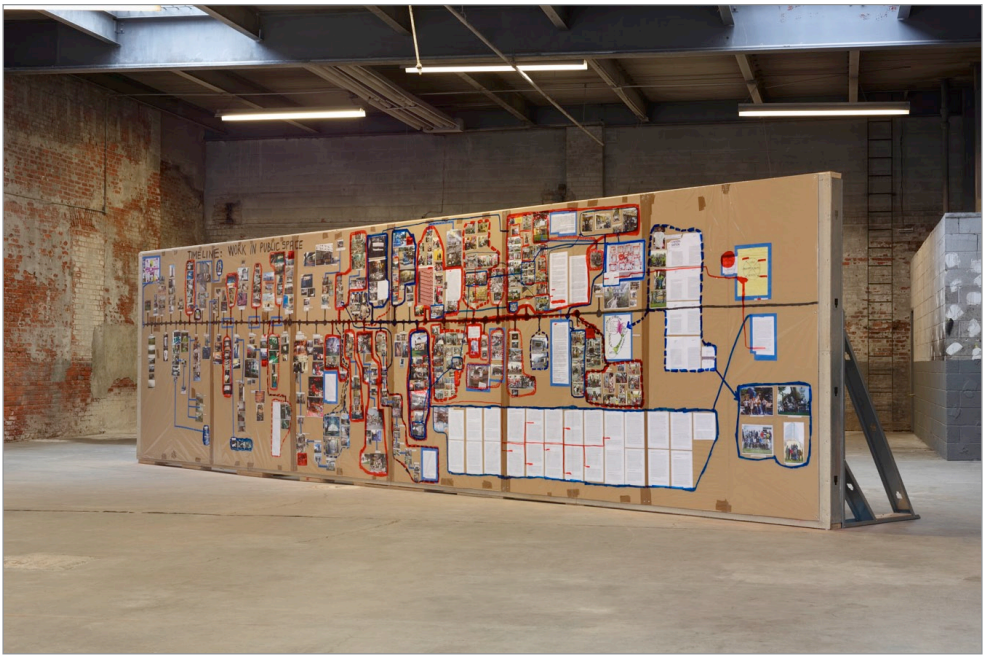
an amazing exhibition space called The Artist's Institute on the Lower East Side in Manhattan. Anthony and I talked once in an interview about the role of the host, and understanding that you are an invited guest of an institution. You're not a king or queen, or establishing a government, or a dictatorship, you are a visitor passing through for a period of time. We all have an expiration date – I'll eventually move on, or be asked to leave, or be lured elsewhere. But when you are in an institution you are the one who opens the door, you are hosting the artist; it all comes down to hospitality. It's very important for me that this hosting starts from the beginning, and it's important that the artist trusts that I'm going to be loyal to his or her work. Loyal despite my opinions, and to the fact that I made an invitation with full consciousness and having done my research. With Koo Jeong A, I knew that she is shy, that she doesn't like to speak in public, that she can sometimes take unconventional decisions, that there were risks of seeming enigmatic, and so on.

L: Can you imagine this pre-production process being something that you'd somehow let people in on? There is the example of the current Carnegie International team who are blogging about studio visits and research trips, and so on.

YR: No, I'm not into that. I'm a rather private person. I'm not on Facebook or anything like that. I wouldn't have wanted people to know when Koo Jeong A was in town. She traveled to New York seven or eight times during the process of conceiving her project at Dia. We also went to *Spiral Jetty* together, and to Bridgehampton, it was a very slow process, and it involved working with a chemist who made perfumes for a living.

L: You're building trust but also making a friendship, and the same time reminding them about deadlines, and so on, so both friendship and professionalism...

YR: Someone once told me that in a true friendship there can't be expectations. I am honoured if an artist considers me her or his friend but my goal is to be the most loyal advocate of their work, to be present and ready to deal with the hard questions, to face the critics, the sceptics, the bureaucrats. I have always got answers to my questions, and it has always worked out. There is no tension because



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I am always available, the artist is my priority and that gets reciprocated. In the end if an artist doesn't respond, doesn't deliver on the colour of the paint, for example, it is not a problem, it is her or his decision, they know what is best for their work.

L: Talking of commitment, you are going to be moving to a different part of New York this summer in order to fully throw yourself into Thomas Hirschhorn's *Gramsci Monument*, which opens on 1 July. This is the forth of these works of Hirschhorn dedicated to major philosophers of the twentieth century, following the *Spinoza Monument* in 1999 [in Amsterdam], the *Deleuze Monument* in 2000 [in Avignon], and the *Bataille Monument* which was realised at *Documenta 11*, Kassel, in 2002. In the same way that Franz Erhard Walther was a key figure in terms of public participation, Hirschhorn also is a key reference for thinking about what it means for art to be public, what it means to be an author. There was a kind of "trailer" for the project in what will become the new Dia space in Chelsea – what did that consist of, and what can we expect in the summer?

09 10 Thomas Hirschhorn
Timeline: Work in Public Space, 2012
Courtesy Gladstone Gallery New York & Brussels
Photo: Ronald Amstutz

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YR: Thomas has been coming to New York for a year and a half. Firstly, let me mention that the most important thing in order for this "slow motion" curating method to work is to have an apartment where artists can stay. We're very lucky that next to the "Earth Room" is a little apartment; they can stay there one month, or two months, and you don't have money problems because it's your property. Otherwise every time you bring an artist you have to send them home in three days because the hotel bill gets too expensive. This already destroys the dynamic, in three days you're just beginning to get to know each other's name and phone number! You really need to spend time with people, have lunches, have dinners, hang out. Dia's offices are in Chelsea, it is not an institutional space in itself, so visiting artists don't have to sign-in, get a pass, any

of these things you do when visiting a museum that make you behave abnormally. These things create a certain relaxed atmosphere.

I said to Thomas that even though he had several exhibitions at Gladstone Gallery in New York, before we do *Gramsci Monument* – which is going to be this major outdoor pavilion in a public housing project in the Bronx – he had never done a major show in a public museum there and we shouldn't assume that New Yorkers know who he is. New York City is very provincial. We have this space next to our office that Dia recently purchased and I asked him if he would consider doing something in anticipation of *Gramsci Monument* so that people would understand where he was coming from. So he made a timeline [*Timeline: Work in Public Space*, 2012] of his sixty projects in public space, from 1989 all the way to his most recent projects. All the ones circled in red were his "failures", which were burned, or stolen, and there were other forms of connections to works which were half-outdoors, half-indoors. There were also all the texts he'd written about the idea of showing work in public space. So I hope that this functioned as an early introduction to the project. We also made a public programme with Thomas Hirschhorn and Hal Foster in conversation.

Gramsci Monument will be an enormous endeavour, we'll be in a neighbourhood for eleven weeks, everyday there will be an activity, an art class, poetry reading, lectures on Antonio Gramsci's writing and his importance today, a theatre piece about his life performed by teenagers, daily talks by the German philosopher Marcus Steinweg who is a great friend of Thomas, an open mic, and so on. The project will soon have its own website, so you'll be able to sign up for updates. I'll be there in the role as an "ambassador" to *Gramsci Monument*.

L: The timeline was exhibited in the recently-acquired former marble works, as you mentioned, which will form the core of Dia's new space, and Dia's returning presence in Chelsea...

YR: Yes, it has been almost ten years since Dia closed its exhibition space in Manhattan, and it has been very difficult for the institution on an identity level to be focussed mainly on the collection, it's almost as if we seemed to

become "adults" institutionally speaking. But there is a thirst and a real hunger to commission new projects with artists now that are not only with the artists of the collection. This goes back to the first question that Doryun [Chong] posed. When I invited Jean-Luc Moulène to do the project at Dia, we considered multiple sites until we narrowed it down to Dia:Beacon. On a certain level it was a serious step for him in that this was his first exhibition in the United States, and many of the artists on display at Dia:Beacon have been influential to him. Here I was offering to deinstall works by Warhol, Bernd and Hilla Becher, and some Judd pieces in order to put his work instead. Psychologically this is not that simple, even though Jean-Luc was confident that the selection of works chosen could stand firmly in the collection, as an artist you look at these other artists with enormous respect, and there is something very big in asking an artist to present their work next to these figures. Imagine you're a painter and I

11 Jean-Luc Moulène *Body, Guyancourt, October 2011*, 2011. Installation view, *Opus + One* Dia:Beacon, Riggio Galleries Photo: Bill Jacobson New York

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put your work in a room next to Agnes Martin – it's hard. For some artists Dia:Beacon will continue to work as a great playground for investigation and dialogue, but we also have to think ahead that there will be artists who do not want that kind of context. I also run the lecture series called "Artists on Artists", and I recently invited the artist R. H. Quaytman, who then told me that she had nothing good to say about any of the artists in the collection. I thought that was fantastic! Despite her refusal to follow the established format – choosing to speak on the work of one of the artists in Dia's collection – she made an incredible portrait of Dia's origins and delivered one of the most powerful lectures in recent years. So it is very important that we keep the door open to contradictions, that we keep listening to the extraordinary artists of our time, that we reinvent our way of working with artists again in Manhattan after ten years of hiatus, and that we have a space that is also neutral to this history from the 60s and 70s. But then again Chelsea is not neutral in that it has the highest density of commercial art activity in New York, where exhibitions are rotating every month. It's a different context, a different energy to wrestle with.

L: The Manhattan that Dia left in 2004 is of course not the same as the one you'll be coming back to: there was no New Museum, no Whitney moving to the Meatpacking District. When the new Dia space opens in 2015–16, how is this counter-position between Beacon and Chelsea going to play, will Beacon be slower and Chelsea be faster?

YR: We don't know yet. It's like you've been living outside of the country for ten years and you need to relearn the accent. We'll start by doing one-year commitment projects, but instigate depending on the artists and what they desire. We need to pay attention and listen, and ask many questions.

L: Speaking of questions, let's run through three more of the contributed questions. Here is one, or several, from your boss: Philippe Vergne, the Director of Dia Art Foundation. Philippe's questions are great but tough: "It seems today that everybody is a curator, that 'curator' is the new 'DJ'. How do you see the evolution of your own profession? Is there a different way to work with artists? And is Dia a place that has embodied proto-curatorial practices

(in the 1970s) and post-curatorial practices (now)?"
YR: I will take revenge when I get back to New York! As to how I see the evolution of the profession, I've only been in this profession for eight years, one year in dog years! But I do see an evolution in that the curators of the past like Harald Szeemann were so concerned with their authorship. Then we have great curators like Hans-Ulrich Obrist or Hou Hanru, Lynne Cooke or Catherine de Zheger, Ann Goldstein or Elisabeth Sussman, a whole generation of curators who I admire for their boldness and rigour on some levels, their scholarship and playfulness, their poetry. Some of them are phenomenal authors, they curate as if they were writing a book. I'm not interested in authoring in that way. When I write a text I am an author, but when I am working with an artist I'm not. I'm more interested in being a host. I look at it from the point of view of politics. I am the one that has to defend the work, first of all to my colleagues inside the institution, and to convince them that this is an exhibition that we need today, an artist we need to support today. Then we all have to convince the visitor. Winning those battles with enthusiasm and knowledge gives me real satisfaction. I've never thought of myself as a DJ, I'm not interested in playing to an audience in order to entertain. I am hostess, I make sure that the experience is unforgettable for the artist.

"When I write a text I am an author, but when I am working with an artist I'm not. I'm more interested in being a host."

The artist Alejandro Cesarco recently gave a powerful talk at Dia about On Kawara, and it was like an artwork lecture, a homage to the great work of On Kawara. The next day I called him to thank him and he said to me that the experience of preparing the talk, of going to the archives, meeting the registrar, and so on, had really humanised his experience of the institution. I thought that was great. I'm a humanist and I want to insist on being humane, and for caring for the one-on-one, the face-to-face. So yes, I do think that Dia is gearing towards the post-curatorial in the sense that I don't think artists need to be curated, I think artists need to be supported, enabled. And Dia means that, the word "dia" in Greek means "through", and we have always said our mission is to facilitate, to be a conduit. So perhaps I'm not a real curator, I'm something else, an enabler, a vessel, and soon I'll add ambassador to that list.

L: Let's quickly move to the final questions. [Independent critic and curator] Maja Ćirić has asked, "What are the 'cutting edge' curatorial practices in United States today (spaces, agents, projects, exhibitions)?" And Agustín Pérez Rubio [Director, MUSAC, León, 2009–2013] asks, "As a curator with a Latin American background, how do you perceive the situation of Latin American art in the US, and more specifically in relation with Dia? Some of the most important Latin American artists lived or live in New York, from Felix Gonzalez-Torres to Luis Camnitzer... what is the relation with them?"

YR: "Cutting edge", what is that? Well, I mentioned before The Artist's Institute in New York, Anthony is asking very interesting questions about format, methodology and duration through his model of curating exhibitions. To answer Agustín, one of the founders of Dia in 1974, Heiner Friedrich, was a German art dealer who represented many of the artists than ended up entering the collection. There has been a few gifts since the 1970s but it is not like there was ever a plan or a committee deciding what to acquire, and we would need to have enormous resources today to commission or acquire large-scale projects in the same way as he did in the 1970s. So the idea of going back – not just to Latin America, but to any context – and to try to collect in depth a whole room of an artist such as Lygia Clark, it is just not possible. There is simply not enough work available to be able to go and buy a whole room now. Perhaps the situation is different with Felix Gonzalez-Torres. But in terms of this relating to my background, I don't really work in that way. Perhaps my Latin gene is only active in my personal life. I'm interested in the energy of really extraordinary art, whether than happens to be made by Luis Camnitzer, or Gonzalez-Torres, or whoever, it doesn't matter. But there is always a question of urgency. Gonzalez-Torres transformed what we understand today as art. But his work has been the subject of really important recent exhibitions and we need to weigh our priorities knowing that Dia cannot do it all. Perhaps one day, but not at the moment, we've made commitments to artists for the next four years.

L: One last question that we had sent in before we open to the audience. Frederic Montornés [independent critic and

curator] asks, "What is your perception of Spanish art? What artists do you know?"

YR: Today I went to see Isidoro Valcárcel Medina's show at ProjecteSD which I thought was fantastic. But my knowledge of Spanish art is zero. I don't want to generalise but in part it has to do with the fact that a great many Spanish artists don't have galleries in the United States. This is problematic for us, for the provincial people of New York. You see for example a great representation of German artists who have pursued additional representation in the US, it has nothing really to do with the fact that they are German, but they are in the US market. French artists are also very little known in the States, they seem happy with their representation in their country, or maybe their galleries don't let them have another gallery in the States, I'm not sure. Crossing the ocean has always been a big deal, transporting things across the Atlantic is not cheap. This is our loss. But when I see work like Isidoro Valcárcel Medina, it's important and poignant and should have been seen in the United States thirty or forty years ago. This lack speaks to the work ahead for many of us in expanding the discourses, and it shows that at the end the global art world is not really global, not yet.

I travel regularly to Europe for work but I generally don't have business in Spain. Hopefully I'll have more reasons to come to Spain and get to know more artists, but at the moment it is not really happening. I get more chances to go to Berlin, Brussels or Paris than to Spain even though I speak Spanish.

L: Let's open up to questions from the audience. Does anyone have a question for Yasmil, or a comment?

Question from the audience [Katerina Gregos]: Hello, I just wanted to get back to you on your point of how you seeing curating. You almost negate your role as a quote-unquote curator when you say that you're a facilitator – and I totally agree with that – but you also said that artists don't need curating, which is somehow marginalising the creative role that a curator might have in negotiating an exhibition or an artwork with an artist. Of course there is a point at which the curator-as-author becomes problematic, but when you're saying you're just a facilitator you're in a way stepping back and not involving your-

self in the process of commissioning, and I think that is a very important dialogue which takes place with the artist. What happens for example when a project is in front of you and you disagree with the way an artist is going, how do you negotiate that? It's important to distance curatorial practice from a kind of dictatorial authorship, but I think there is a lot that can be said in terms of how curating can be creative and can help the artistic process and certainly can avert disasters!

YR: I'm one-hundred percent involved, it's all I do. With Jean-Luc Moulène I met his master printer in Paris and supervised 299 photographs. I'm micro-managing the

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entire production so to speak, I became the studio assistant. I sent back fifty photographs that had hairs or thumbprints, and watched the framing of the 299 to make sure it was well done. Jean-Luc makes the decisions, it's his responsibility, it's his artwork. I cannot take control of that, but I can make sure that it gets produced with quality and that nothing gets missed or broken. When he says he wants the floor done in a particular way, I have to convince my colleagues to do that. I'm the negotiator with these questions. He's the one that makes the decisions about the art. Yes I have creativity in that I make sure I get everything done in the way the artist wants it, and of course I have to be creative with the budget, with the gallerists, with the graphic designers, with the

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Installation view
La Vigie, *Opus + One*
Dia:Beacon, Riggio Galleries
Photo: Bill Jacobson
New York

publication authors – creative and diplomatic. When we come to decide the floor plans, for example, I can make recommendations to the artist, and of course when we are installing I can make suggestions. But ultimately I chose the artist, my own creativity gets done that first day I make the phone call inviting them. I have to trust the artist if they tell me that it is most important that their work is hung from A–Z, even if I think that Z–A is much better. I could present it as a suggestion, but I have to learn that he or she has been an artist for a long time. I don't work with young artists at Dia. Working with artists of a certain age also changes this dynamic because I can't tell an artist who has had many exhibitions what to do, like Jean-Luc, or Thomas Hirschhorn who has had sixty projects alone in public space! Even if I think a decision is problematic and potentially disastrous, I have to take my place and understand that having been a curator for eight years is very different to having been an artist for thirty-five. I'm asking for artists to trust me, to be the best representative of their work, and to be the one sticking her neck out for them when faced with the politics of the institution. But I have to trust them, that they know how to make art. In the end if something goes wrong, it is me that is going to have to talk to the press, or explain to the board or to my director.

"Even if I think a decision is problematic and potentially disastrous, I have to take my place and understand that having been a curator for eight years is very different to having been an artist for thirty-five."

Question from the audience [**Antonia Alampi**]:
I would like to pick up on what you said about humanising the institution in terms of your relationship to the collection. Having such an important collection also puts you in a position of power in some sense. You mentioned the Van Abbemuseum, somewhere that deals a lot with the potential that a collection has for making radical projects, such as *Picasso in Palestine*. Them asking the visitor about their favourite artwork becomes not just about the local, but about making visible what the parameters are of the acquisition of a work and how that can change through time, about what it means today to own works that were collected at another time. You suggested that you were more interested in the global audience and not in the local, does this happen through the web interface, how do you mean this?

YR: The comment about humanising the institution, I

mean to artists. The mission of Dia is very artist centred. I don't know how many institutions really care about artists, a great deal of institutions are really interested in audiences. That's fine, I'm not here to convert people. I'm very happy that the Van Abbemuseum is interested in its local community but this is not the case with the institution that I work for. The main word in Dia's mission is "artists". My first responsibility is to them, and what I have observed is that many institutions have become so cookie-cutter and pragmatic that they treat artists as if they are a commodity. There is no real getting-to-know, they don't care if they're sleeping in a good place or what their partner's name is; I'm being very serious here. The majority of institutions treat artists like, "let's have a one-night stand, I don't need to know your name". Of course I can't host every single person that lives in Beacon. I don't live there, my office is not there, there are 500 or so people that come every day. There is a contradiction when curators say that they're there for the audience, because they're usually not! The people who are with the audience are the ones selling the tickets, or the guards, they are the public face of the institution, they get the complaints if someone doesn't like what they see. The curator is usually in an office, or an airplane, or at a biennial!

In terms of humanising the institution to the public, well we're quite bad at that if you mean that Dia:Beacon doesn't have artwork labels. When you arrive in the galleries there are just small laminated sheets in some of the galleries that you have to find in a box. There will not be a wall vinyl telling you anything. So the voice of the institution is hidden in a box, that's true. But I like that, I don't think I'm here to tell people what to think about art; everyone has the capacity for seeing and understanding art. It would be wonderful if there was some magic language in which the more we write and tell meant someone would have an epiphany in front of Robert Ryman. I'd like to believe that, but I'd also like to believe that when you're in front of a Robert Ryman, you will in any case have an epiphany. Maybe I'm very naïve, but I'm such a believer in art; when you're in front of Donald Judd's works, your mind can explode. I don't need to write a label that will seduce anybody, I trust those plywood boxes, that stuff is

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magic. But I believe the wall label situation is fine for now. You pick your battles. Institutions are very different all over the world, we assume they are the same but they're not, it is hard to generalise. Maybe under a different situation, Dia would dedicate its energy and resources not so much to artists but to audiences.

Question from the audience [Luigi Fassi]:
Would you ever consider doing a group exhibition apart from your association with Dia?

YR: Dia has never done group exhibitions, and I don't do group exhibitions because I work at Dia. I have done group exhibitions before at the Walker but they were always quite complicated for me in terms of this question of authorship, I struggled with this. I became a curator because I wanted to be near art and artists, I think they are among the most extraordinary people on earth in terms of ideas and vision.

L: We have to wrap it up there, thank you to everyone for coming. And especially thank you Yasmil for joining us today. Good night. **#**

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Installation view
Opus + One, Dia:Beacon
Riggio Galleries
Photo: Bill Jacobson
New York

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