PROJECT PROFILE

Growing Connectivity

ANNE MULLEE INTERVIEWS BARCELONA-BASED MARIANA CÁNEPA LUNA & MAX ANDREWS – WHO WORK TOGETHER AS 'LATITUDES' – ABOUT THEIR ONGOING #OPENCURATING PROJECT.

Latitudes' newsroom at 'The Last Newspaper' New Museum, New York. 2010, photo by Latitudes.

Latitudes speaking at 'Within the Public Realm', Hugh Lane, Dublin, March 2013

Latitudes' newsroom at 'The Last Newspaper' New Museum, New York. 2010, photo by Latitudes.

IN early March, Dublin played host to curators Mariana Cánepa Luna and Max Andrews, aka Barcelona-based partnership Latitudes. The pair were in town as part of Dublin's cultural twinning with the Catalan city and, during their visit, spoke to MAVIS [1] students about some recent projects; participated in the Hugh Lane's 'Within the Public Realm' (12 March 2013) curatorial seminar on public art (alongside organiser Amanda Ralph, curator Aisling Prior and artist Sean Lynch); visited CCA Derry; as well as conducting studio visits arranged by Firestation Artists' Studios and Temple Bar Gallery and Studios.

Since initiating their curatorial office in 2005, Cánepa Luna and Andrews have worked all over the world researching and devising projects, including #OpenCurating – which comprises a series of research interviews investigating what they describe as the "increasing expectation of participation and transparency" demanded of curatorial practice in the wake of Web 2.0. [2]

Anne Mullee: How did the #OpenCurating project come about?
Max Andrews: It grew out of a project we made in 2010 in the New Museum in New York, called 'The Last Newspaper', where we were invited as a partner organisation. It was an exhibition about artists working with the newspaper as a format and more generally about the artist-as-editor and artist-as-journalist in the context of how the internet has more or less destroyed the original business model of news making as printed news. So we were in the museum galleries making a weekly newspaper, 12 pages every week for 10 weeks, reporting for the exhibition itself as a kind of micro community as well as covering the exhibition as if it was something to be reported on.

Mariana Cánepa Luna: We are interested in inclusion: the plural voice, as well as the singular voice. We also dedicated pages to what new initiatives are taking place online or in print and what kind of agencies are involved, *ie*: How are these changes evolving? How do we analyse them? From there, it seemed natural to look into how curating is also being changed by the internet.

MA: While the internet hasn't quite changed art practice to the degree that it has impacted on the music industry or newspapers, for example, one of the things that came to our attention was the relationship between a collection, an exhibition and a catalogue. With the newspaper, we were making a different kind of choral catalogue for the show – where normally you would have a curator writing a single channel of information.

AM: Do you think that there's a hierarchy of documentation in terms of the print review, as opposed to online writing, being seen as the mark of success?
MCL: I certainly think so, but I'm hoping it will change. Art bloggers provide a different point of view, in my opinion. Print or online, it's not that one is better than the other, they are just different. In print, institutions can edit a catalogue and supervise who will write about what, and the language is very academic or historical. We involved the kind of people that you might expect would write for catalogues – art curators, art writers, *etc* – but also visitors and museum guards, for example. Both the language and the temporality of the publication were very different from a regular exhibition catalogue.

AM: How do you feel that this affected the artists and their practice represented in 'The Last Newspaper' exhibition? Did they engage with your process during the show?

MA: Most of the works in the show were existing pieces, loaned for the occasion. The new productions were with the five partner organisations, including us. In that way, there was separation between what was 'hardware': the artwork, and what was 'software': the newspapers we produced, or the interviews that the organisation StoryCorps were doing. We also organised events with a view to re-articulating the more static content.

From this experience we became more interested in the effect of the internet on art practice, curating and institutions, in both a technological and a behavioural way. And, generally, how the internet has made curators rethink what they're doing, in terms of making interfaces between a collection and an audience.

AM: Indeed, several of your #OpenCurating interviews have been with collecting institutions, such as the Walker Art Centre in Minneapolis, which is also concerned with exploring audience engagement through its internet presence...
MA: The interviews cut across almost every institutional department. They address the idea of what a curator might be in the context of communications and the archive – in the same way that being a journalist today is not just about writing news stories, it's being a witness, researcher, communicator and community representative.

MCL: And this is the case with all scales of institutions. Our latest interview was with the Dia Art Foundation in New York, which has a narrower collection compared to, for example, the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, and it is less 'historical' than the Walker Art Centre. We started the series with the Walker, because we knew this institution and we were interested in the recent redevelopment of its website.

There were questions that could have been asked across the whole museum. This was why for the Walker interview we involved three people, representing different aspects of their mission. Effectively, their new website is a kind of newspaper that generates content as much as representing its collection and programmes.

MA: With #OpenCurating we are not definitively championing the idea that every museum needs to be much more participatory, or that everyone needs to be thinking about opening up their research. We have a kind of healthy scepticism about participation – there is an expectation that there's a demand for this, but is it always necessarily the right thing to do?

AM: So there can be a tension between creating a more open 'space' and mediating what's already there in terms of collections?
MA: Yes. Collections can be mediated in many different ways. Art can be presented as artefact and vice versa. For example, a letter from a museum director to a collector, or a drawing made by an artist during the planning of an installation could be treated as kinds of conceptual art objects.

MCL: We're interested in what is being told, and in what way it's being told – in who tells the story.

MA: A website can say far more than "come and see our show". It can acknowledge different audiences and levels of engagement – physical and non-physical. You might be able to follow an institution's programme without ever having been there.

AM: From your findings so far, with #OpenCurating, what do you both envisage as the next steps for curating?
MCL & MA: Trying to understand what 'old rules' and behaviours the internet has broken and continues to break – for better or for worse – is a fundamental challenge. More and more is being expected of public art institutions and their curators, directors, educators, editors, archivists, communications specialists, *etc* in terms of defining their core purpose, their ongoing relationship to their collections and working out to what degree they are concerned with listening to audiences and growing their 'connectivity'.

AM: When you come back to Ireland, what research might you want to undertake?
MCL & MA: It's difficult to say, as there is nothing specific lined up as of yet. But there were certainly artists we met during our visit to Dublin whose work we think is really engaging, and we'd hope to find a way to collaborate in the future. It has been unusual for us to have being doing such an extended phase of research for #OpenCurating, and we're naturally keen to remain involved in exhibition making and artistic programming.

www.lttds.org/projects/opencurating