

# THE ARTIST AS CURATOR

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## AN ANTHOLOGY

Edited by  
Elena Filipovic

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## PREFACE

Publications on museums and exhibition making have by now grown into a veritable cottage industry, with entire bookshelves devoted to the subjects. Star curator figures, especially über-curator Harald Szeemann, are prominent in that field, their projects, practices, and words garnering significant attention. Yet in the context of long-sustained and venerable art historical scholarship, the *history* of the exhibition is still nascent (if recently beginning to expand), and the story of the artist as curator, a key aspect of that fascinating narrative, largely remains to be written.

When Elena Filipovic first approached us with her idea to begin to rectify this lacuna, it had already been long in the making in her head, but without the right partner to make it a reality. Just as we began embarking together on what would become *The Artist as Curator*, a series that occupied eleven issues of *Mousse* from no. 41 (December 2013/January 2014) to no. 51 (December 2015/January 2016), the practice of reconstructing an exhibition, a quite rare curatorial act before then, had received a shot in the arm with the re-creation of Harald Szeemann's landmark 1969 exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form*, which restaged the seminal show almost work by work, square meter by square meter. Against that background, the series dared to ask: Why have exhibitions organized by artists remained so relatively impervious to historicization?

*The Artist as Curator* investigated this question across twenty newly commissioned or specially reprinted essays. What follows is the original introduction to that series and all the essays as they appeared in *Mousse*, along with two additional newly minted texts, together covering a range of exhibitions by artists from the post-war to the present, with an afterword by Hans Ulrich Obrist.

Such an ambitious project as *The Artist as Curator* and now this anthology of its contents would not have been possible without the incredible generosity of an engaged group of art institutions, foundations, and private individuals. For their trust and commitment, we gratefully acknowledge: Bergen Kunsthall; CAPC / Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux; Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva; De Appel Arts Centre, Amsterdam; Fundación Almine y Bernard Ruiz-Picasso para el Arte; Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo; Fondazione Prada, Milan/Venice; HangarBicocca, Milan; Kunsthalle Basel; Museo Marino Marini, Florence; Portikus, Frankfurt; The Renaissance Society, Chicago; Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste Städtelschule, Frankfurt; and WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels, as well as Claire Burrus, Herman Daled, Massimo Minini, Jan Mot, Ethan Wagner, and Thea Westreich, all of whom helped fund the research and production of this project. At each institution or foundation we were surrounded by supportive directors or curators who aided in making their respective institutions partners in the project.

We are indebted to Lindsey Westbrook for her steadfast care with copyediting and proofing both the series and this volume, and to Fausto Giliberti for designing them.

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Finally, and mostly, we thank Elena, for absolutely everything.

—Edoardo Bonaspetti and Stefano Cernuschi

**INTRODUCTION (WHEN EXHIBITIONS BECOME FORM:  
ON THE HISTORY OF THE ARTIST AS CURATOR)**

We know some of the fabulous stories, like the one about Gustave Courbet setting up shop across the way from the 1855 Salon in Paris. His rogue pavilion aimed to present his work differently and better, he claimed, than the French state would have in its crammed annual exhibition, where paintings were stacked to the ceiling with apparent disregard for the integrity of the works on show. The Salon officials had rejected the artist's major works from the period, including *The Artist's Studio* (1854–55) and *A Burial at Ornans* (1849–50), so his entrepreneurial one-person show (something unheard of in its day) would, he imagined, be not only a fitting riposte, but also a revenge on the exhibition conventions favored by the Salon. One can picture him, realist painting's master craftsman, peddling photographic reproductions of his paintings and charging for admission as well as for the checking of canes and umbrellas in order to pay for the affair.<sup>1</sup> In a time long before the advent of the fully professionalized species known as the "curator," an artist was endeavoring, on his own, to choose the location, organize the scenography, make the selection of artworks to be featured, and even devise the financing scheme—all so that he might better determine the conditions of his work's reception. With the twentieth century even more such seeming anomalies arrived: artists who not only quietly made discrete objects in their studios but took into their own hands the very apparatus of presentation and dissemination of the work they had produced—and often that of other artists as well.

The annals of art history are full of such anecdotes, although they sit almost without exception on the periphery of official narratives. The reasons for this are perhaps no mystery: despite its fundamental importance as a primary context through which art is first made public, circulated, seen, and discussed, the exhibition has long been considered an ambiguous object of study at best, partly due to the tenuousness of

the exhibition's—*any* exhibition's—ontological ground, no matter who curated it. Neither a stable, immutable, collectible thing (the usual stuff of art history), nor a clear product of any single hand (being, as they are, determined as much by the artist-made objects they comprise as by the curator who organizes said objects); decidedly not autonomous; often deemed "merely" a frame; and irrevocably tied to the mundane pragmatics of administration (thus supposedly less "pure" and "creative" than an artwork): these are some of the reasons that might explain why exhibition history, in general, took so long to gain traction as a bona fide object of study.<sup>2</sup> Yet why the peculiar and specific genus that is the artist-curated exhibition has taken even longer to be theorized requires another explanation.

Any explanation would surely be related to the ontological impurity of exhibitions in the wider sense, but artist-curated examples arguably further exacerbate the exhibition's precarious nature, sitting uncomfortably close to artistic work, and yet still evidently not quite qualifying as artworks. Even if they are the product of an artist or artist collective, artist-curated exhibitions cannot be thought through the romantic idea of the artist as individual producer of immutable objects that follow a progressive, evolutive development of forms classifiable according to artistic movement, style, or "turn." Neither is it clear how to consider them in relation to an artistic oeuvre (is an artist-curated exhibition, for instance, entered into an artist's catalogue raisonné? Does it get listed in the artist's curriculum vitae along with other group exhibitions? Or rather with the solo shows?). Nor is it apparent whether they can be usefully compared (as artworks are) in discussions regarding the development of parallel artistic oeuvres or movements.

Speaking of exhibition history in general, the writer and curator Simon Sheikh raised the following question: "What does it mean to shift

attention from objects to exhibitions? . . . We have to ask ourselves not only what a history of exhibitions can tell us about art but also what a history of exhibitions will tell us about history, how it is written and read, rewritten and reread.”<sup>3</sup> In response, he advanced the following proposition: if a history of exhibitions were to be written, it should perhaps be based on the historian Reinhart Koselleck’s notion of “conceptual history”—in other words, a history examined not through stylistic or chronological devices, but instead through the (materially embodied) concepts and ideas that presumably underpin the exhibitions in question.<sup>4</sup> Sheikh suggests, for example, “democracy,” “the state,” “freedom,” and “progress” as such possible categories. Although provocative, it is not clear what such a conceptual history of exhibitions would look like, particularly given the profoundly ambiguous nature of the concepts he suggests, nor whether such a methodology could adequately address the history of that complex and labile object that is the exhibition. Yet to Shiekh’s compelling set of questions one could add: Once we have written that history, how do we attend to the specific genus that is the artist-curated exhibition? What can *it* tell us about history, art history, and exhibition history—about how these are written and read, rewritten and reread?

How to contextualize artist-curated exhibitions? Should their narration follow (like most art history courses being taught even today) a linear, chronological, even progressive direction (think of Alfred H. Barr Jr.’s famous flow chart), going from, say, Courbet to Mark Leckey? Or, instead, might one think in terms of typologies rather than chronology (or style or movement)?<sup>5</sup> Such typologies could include solo projects as exhibitions (Claes Oldenburg’s *The Store*, 1961; Marcel Broodthaers’s *Département des Aigles*, 1968–72); political-activist exhibitions (Group Material’s *AIDS Timeline*, 1989; Alice Creischer, Andreas Siekmann, and Max Jorge Hinderer’s *The Potosí Principle*, 2010); the rearranging of museum or other collections in, and as, exhibitions (Andy Warhol’s *Raid the Icebox I, with Andy Warhol*, 1969; Fred Wilson’s *Mining the Museum*, 1992); exhibitions as sensorial experiences (Yves Klein’s *Le Vide*, 1958; David Hammons’s *Concerto in Black and Blue*, 2002); and so on. You will read extended meditations on several of these, and others, in this volume. Still, maybe

the overarching problem with any of these possible organizational principles is that they fail to address the shared condition of so many of these artist-curated exhibitions—namely, that their aims, methods, structures, and modes of address undermine, or even denature, established ideas of the exhibition.

Peruse Bruce Altshuler’s formidable two-volume work *From Salon to Biennial* and *Biennials and Beyond*, both subtitled *Exhibitions that Made Art History*.<sup>6</sup> Some of the exhibitions he features include the first Blaue Reiter exhibition, Moderne Galerie Tannhäuser, Munich, 1911; the Armory Show, New York, 1913; *Cubism and Abstract Art*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1936; *The New American Painting*, Tate, London, 1959; *Primary Structures*, the Jewish Museum, New York, 1966; *Magiciens de la Terre*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1989; and documenta 11, Kassel, 2002. There is no doubt that any and all of these merit inclusion in the history of exhibitions if for no other reason than because they introduced new art to a public. *Cubism and Abstract Art*, for example, brought together works by those eponymous movements for the first time in 1936; *Primary Structures* gathered in an institutional setting the kinds of objects that would later be grouped under Minimalism for the first time in 1966; *Magiciens de la Terre* challenged Western hegemonies by showing the first truly “global” panorama of art in 1989, and so on. Whatever can be said about these indeed important exhibitions that, as Altshuler suggests, “*made* art history,” they were classical in many senses of the word. In most cases, they simply brought the “new” into a space that remained unaltered by the confrontation; few of them fundamentally or radically troubled the conventions, structures, and protocols of the exhibition as *form*.<sup>7</sup>

If it is easy to see that artist-curated exhibitions can trouble our very understanding of such notions as “artistic autonomy,” “authorship,” “artwork,” and “artistic oeuvre,” what might be less evident is that they also complicate what counts as an “exhibition.” Many artist-curated exhibitions—perhaps the most striking and influential of the genre—are the result of artists treating the exhibition as an artistic medium in its own right, *an articulation of form*. In the process, they often disown or dismantle the very idea of the “exhibition” as it is conventionally thought, putting its

genre, category, format, or protocols at stake and thus entirely shifting the terms of what an exhibition could be. Courbet’s example suggests that the impulse among artists to take the organization of exhibitions into their own hands already existed in the late nineteenth century, yet it was for the avant-gardes of the early twentieth to further develop the potentials of the exhibition as medium. And, following them, a postwar generation of artists finally so radically tackled the form that they fundamentally transformed the shape of exhibitions thereafter—not only those curated by artists, but also those generated by professional curators.

In order to better understand how artists approached the genre throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, an examination of the case of Marcel Duchamp provides an interesting, pioneering example. While he is most lauded for the provocation of claiming a store-bought object as art, his lifelong role as curator was arguably no less radical or influential a gesture. Dorothea von Hantelmann credits Duchamp with inaugurating what she calls “the curatorial paradigm,” arguing that “in the field of art it was Marcel Duchamp who anticipated, paradigmatically performed, and articulated” a new archetype of creativity. In her view, it was his *choice* (which is what she considers *curatorial*) that allowed the readymade to mark “the transition of a production-oriented society to a selection-oriented society.”<sup>8</sup> Von Hantelmann goes on to state: “Duchamp turned the act of choosing into a new paradigm of creativity. Or, rather, he sharpened a practice that has always existed into something like a paradigm.” That Duchamp inaugurated a curatorial paradigm is quite right, although I would argue that it is *not* at all because of his “choice” or “selection” with regard to the readymade (nor do I imagine the curator primarily a “selector” of things). Rather, Duchamp inaugurated a curatorial paradigm through his understanding of the exhibition as a means of interrogation, a tool by which to critically question the limits of both the (art) object and its institutions, all of which importantly determined the fate of his readymade even more than his mere selection did.<sup>9</sup>

Although the profession of the “curator” was hardly very defined or prevalent when Duchamp first began to adopt curatorial operations as part

of his artistic practice, and he would never explicitly use the term to describe himself, the notion progressively became concretized in the half century during which he worked, solidifying into its present-day sense, describing an art professional attending to the manifold tasks connected to the caretaking of art and its public exhibition.<sup>10</sup> Still, the “curator,” no matter how one defined that role, had aims and responsibilities quite distinct from that of the artist, and vice versa, making it all the more unusual that Duchamp so frequently and insistently engaged in the tasks associated with curatorial work. More than occasional occupations or undertakings ancillary to the “actual” work of the artist and the artwork, Duchamp arguably made “curatorial” tasks a veritable lifework and the pivotal catalyst through which to understand and expose the artwork as such.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, through Duchamp’s deep preoccupation with the institutional sites, mechanisms, and conventions that accompany and ostensibly lie outside of the artwork, he radically shifted both the exhibition’s and the artwork’s terms (and not solely, as has been so long thought, through an act of artistic fiat—either “invention,” “declaration,” or “selection”—that transformed a urinal into *Fountain*).

One could cite his early relationship to exhibitions as a prelude to his later, actual curating. For instance, in 1916, in response to an eager gallerist’s request to feature one of his paintings in a group show, he insisted on including two of his readymades as well—making it their first public appearance in an exhibition. He placed the everyday objects without fanfare or indication in the coat check area of the gallery (with no label, no pedestal, no special lighting, and no discussion about them) and they—perhaps unsurprisingly—went totally unnoticed.<sup>12</sup> Duchamp was not in any way the curator here, but his orchestration of the exercise seems to treat the exhibition not only as a locale for the presentation of things but also as a site of inquiry, a testing ground from which the artist might have learned that an object perhaps only appears as a work of art under certain conditions, one of which is to be explicitly on *exhibit*, with all the protocol this entails. After this incident, Duchamp would repeatedly and insistently be involved in curating exhibitions, recognizing that the discursive and institutional apparatuses around the artwork could be used, experimented with, rethought.

Ultimately, as his exhibitions from the 1930s until the end of his life reveal, he rendered the exhibition utterly unlike the showplaces of artifacts hung more or less high on the wall that the museum at the time treated them as.

Only one year later, in 1917, Duchamp took on the role of president of the “hanging committee” for the inaugural exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York.<sup>13</sup> In that capacity, he devised a curious system for the arrangement of the show, proposing to hang the artworks not according to school, style, or chronology, but alphabetically and according to chance, beginning the exhibition with the first letter selected from a hat—thereby ensuring absolutely no favoritism while defying every known system according to which shows were typically organized. Arguably, it was precisely because he was president of the hanging committee that he made sure that another gesture he performed would be anonymous: he pseudonymously submitted a store-bought piece of porcelain plumbing entitled *Fountain* to the exhibition. The urinal, signed “R. Mutt 1917,” was, as the now-famous story goes, rejected before being lost or destroyed (no one quite knows which).<sup>14</sup> Few had any idea that a certain Marcel Duchamp was behind *Fountain*; not even some of his closest friends and patrons knew, and the artist didn’t publicly mention his connection to the object for decades.<sup>15</sup> As far as von Hantelmann’s idea of curatorial paradigms go, the urinal may have been an artwork selected, but in 1917 it had not been shown or noticed, and it had decidedly not entered into history. It might as well have never existed at all, in fact.<sup>16</sup>

When Duchamp did finally reveal his connection to *Fountain*—which is to say, when he began several decades later to construct a public history for an object that by that point no longer existed and one that had, moreover, made no impact while it did exist—his revelation was entirely bound up with his thinking about exhibitions, art institutions, and their administration of what counts as “Art.” The “invention” of the readymade needed to be curated; in other words, it required a public exhibition, which it finally got in Duchamp’s creation of an exhibition in a suitcase, *La Boîte-en-valise* (The Box in a Valise, 1938–42). The artist constructed the miniature portable exhibition for his *Fountain* (along with

reproductions of sixty-eight other artworks) at the exact moment that he was preparing the first of what would be a series of elaborate exhibitions with the Surrealists for which he was the curator (or the “generator arbitrator,” in the Surrealists’ and his idiosyncratic terminology). He would act in that role again and again over his lifetime: first in 1938, then in 1942, 1947, 1959, and 1960. In other words, Duchamp’s investigations into the enunciative capacity and authoritative functioning of the full-size exhibition is inseparable from his creation of a miniature version of a retrospective exhibition that allowed him to play, literally, the museum’s game on his own terms. On the other hand, with flashlights as exhibition lighting, suspended coal bags as a ceiling, and department-store revolving doors as supports for paintings (as in the *Exposition internationale du surréalisme* [International Surrealist Exhibition] in 1938), or with artworks strung amid a web of miles of ordinary string that obstructed passage and vision (as for the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition in 1942), to name just two examples, his exhibitions were, in each case, radical reimaginings of the conventions of display that proved immensely influential to the generations of artists that came after him.

Indeed, there are numerous examples of artists who, each in their own way, subsequently took up the practice of exhibition making as a critical medium. In the postwar period, Richard Hamilton and Victor Pasmore’s programmatically titled *an Exhibit* of 1957 is of emblematic dimensions. Comprised of variously colored acrylic sheets differing in their degree of transparency, strung from the ceiling and placed at right angles to each other, the exhibition appeared as a maze-like spatial structure within which spectators could move about. It was an exhibition with “no images,” which in the artists’ minds meant no artworks as such, and, in Hamilton’s words, “no subject, no theme other than itself,” which is to say, nearly none of the primary elements that would make an exhibition an exhibition. Instead, as Hamilton added, “it was self-referential,”<sup>17</sup> and, explaining his intentions further, “I wanted to . . . make the exhibition into an art form in its own right—an exhibition about an exhibition.”<sup>18</sup> In the process, the artists made a *display of display*. As both the content and driving methodology of the exhibition, “display” became a material surface and catalyst

for visual and spatial experience. Hamilton and Pasmore’s was a gesture of withdrawal—“un-exhibiting” as a mode of exhibiting. Along with similarly radical methodologies advanced in a number of other artist-curated exhibitions that would follow in *an Exhibit*’s wake, it pursued the radical reversal of the art exhibition’s usual mandate: questioning, probing, reimagining what the content and the terms of display for exhibitions could be.

Less than a year later, for his exhibition *Le Vide* (The Void), Yves Klein painted the whole interior of a Parisian art gallery exhibition space white, removing all of the usual, recognizable “content” from the space. It was not just a gallery emptied or simply repainted: the very whiteness that was the signature of the modern white cube was rendered an extreme of itself. Whiter than white, Klein’s careful paint job combined several coats of pure white lithopone pigment blended with his own special varnish of alcohol, acetone, and vinyl resin.<sup>19</sup> As he later recounted:

*The object of this endeavor: to create, establish, and present to the public a palpable pictorial state in the limits of a picture gallery. In other words, the creation of an ambience, a genuine pictorial climate, and, therefore, an invisible one. This invisible pictorial state within the gallery space should be so present and endowed with autonomous life that it should literally be what has hitherto been regarded as the best overall definition of painting: radiance.*<sup>20</sup>

The exhibition opening was a willfully provocative, decidedly staged affair. Many of the conventions of the art exhibition were used, but also exaggerated: specially printed invitation cards (3,500—a considerable number for a gallery show at the time), a commissioned text by a critic, an entrance fee (unheard of in commercial galleries but common in museums), an opening speech, drinks for the occasion (special blue cocktails), and hired guards out front (two mounted Republican guards, no less). And when Klein discovered a young man playfully drawing on his freshly painted gallery wall, he promptly called security and had him thrown out. In other words, the space operated according to many of the rules and institutional policies that would typically characterize an exhibition, except for the radical evacuation of the exhibition’s

conventional *raison d’être*: anything that might be mistaken for an artwork on exhibit was absent.

A few years later, in December 1966, Mel Bochner, then a young instructor at the School of Visual Arts in New York, placed four identical ring binders—each with one hundred copies of studio notes, working drawings, and diagrams collected and Xeroxed by the artist—on pedestals in the school’s gallery for its winter show. He entitled it *Working Drawings And Other Visible Things On Paper Not Necessarily Meant To Be Viewed As Art*. Each binder contains photocopies of preparatory drawings for artists’ projects: Dan Flavin’s proposals for his light installations, Sol LeWitt’s sketches of white lattices, Eva Hesse’s numerical progressions, Carl Andre’s studies for poetry, and Donald Judd’s work plans (including even a bill for fabrication costs), as well as the technical drawing of the Xerox machine used to make the copies included in the binders. As an exhibition, *Working Drawings* deployed some of the most recognizable conventions of the exhibition at the time—a white cube space, pristine display conditions, pedestals—but used them in order to undermine some of the very pillars of the exhibition by operating according to minimal and conceptual paradigms instead of presenting anything that would have looked like bona fide art at the time. *Working Drawings* “dematerialized” the auratic, visual artwork into a reproducible idea, a notion that became a hallmark of late-1960s Conceptualism.

By displaying a reproducible document with all the markers of an artwork on exhibition, Bochner not only prioritized what Siegelau would later call “secondary” over “primary” information, but he actually made a show of it. It is said that when the Museum of Modern Art rejected Bochner’s offer to donate the binders to its collection as artworks (they were the product, after all, of artists’ generative processes) and instead only agreed to accept them as a potential donation to its library, Bochner refused. Although the story is perhaps apocryphal, the fact that it still circulates is telling. It is about a museum (as museums are wont to do) attempting to defend the idea of the singular work of art against the perceived threat of “the reproduction.” For Bochner, however, *Working Drawings* purposefully destabilized hierarchies between

originality and reproduction as much as it did between exhibition and artwork.

On the other side of the globe, in 1968, a series of events and exhibitions by a group of young Argentine artists from Buenos Aires and Rosario called the Experimental Art Cycle took place. Their activities would lead to the conception of a large activist research, information, and exhibition campaign, *Tucumán Arde* (Tucumán Burns), held later that year.<sup>21</sup> As part of the cycle of events that led to *Tucumán Arde*, the artist Graciela Carnevale opened her *Acción del Encierro* (Confinement Action) in an empty Rosario storefront gallery whose windows she had papered over. The event consisted of her locking up attendees to the opening for more than an hour. Guests (or “prisoners,” as the artist later referred to them) only afterward realized that their sequestration in the empty exhibition space (and the resultant confusion, fear, paranoia, and eventual escape) was the exhibition itself. The confinement made them, as the artist recounts, “obliged, violently, to participate”—an effect partially thwarted by a passerby who saw the desperate incarcerated crowd (who by this point had peeled off the posters covering the window) and broke the glass to let them out.<sup>22</sup> Once outside of the exhibition context, and just before the police brought the exhibition-action to an abrupt end, the audience was given a photocopied statement that drew a parallel between their experience and the abuses perpetrated by the Argentine military dictatorship on a daily basis. Although *Confinement Action* was as much an activist performance as an exhibition, it is relevant that Carnevale specifically chose the medium and format of the exhibition as a means of staging her own version of aesthetic withdrawal, countering the expectations of the artwork and its normative, spectacular display.

An altogether different sort of refusal to deliver an exhibition of artworks (or, in this case, the solo show that the original invitation to the artist specified) was Martha Rosler’s 1989 *If You Lived Here . . .* held at the Dia Art Foundation, New York. Part artist research project, part curated group exhibition (itself made up of three exhibition cycles, four public meetings, and numerous accompanying events), it offered a makeshift, disorderly mix of art and non-art items (charts, graphs, maps, newspaper clippings) by

known and less-known artists and non-artists alike about homelessness, housing injustices in New York, and the conditions that made such things possible. Delivering an implicit critique of the host institution located in the then-flourishing art market district in SoHo, the project connected its immediate exhibition surroundings to broader systems that made homelessness and human precarity thrive (gentrification, corruption, complicity, rampant capitalism). Practically speaking, this was an exhibition space transformed into a town hall for meetings, providing a place for discussion, research, and information spreading, but also cooking and sleeping (with seating and makeshift shelter included). It was a place to instill activism, communal participation, and engagement. It looked and operated little like a typical art exhibition, and its reception, both by its host institution and by the local press, revealed the difficulty with which it was recognized as an exhibition at all (rather than, say, social activism). Nevertheless, through it, Rosler inspired a whole generation of artists—from Liam Gillick to Rirkrit Tiravanija—and participatory practices in art, and she also significantly influenced what went on to become called the “discursive exhibition,” a pedagogic, activist turn in art that used the exhibition as a privileged public forum.

Still other examples offering altogether different responses to the question of what might constitute an exhibition could be cited, like David Hammons’s unannounced 1994 exhibition at Knobkerry, an operating New York shop for Asian and African objects, where his works slyly infiltrated the emporium’s usual artifacts with no indication through presentation or signage as to the differing status of each. Hiding in plain sight, as so much of his work and person does, Hammons’s project was as much an investigation of the relationship of the artwork to the commodity as it was a reflection on the form of an “art” exhibition. Or there is Lucy McKenzie and Paulina Ołowska’s *Nova Popularna* (2003), an exhibition that took the form of a temporary illegal speakeasy in Warsaw. Taking over a space loaded with historical resonance as the site of avant-garde happenings in previous decades, the duo of artists designed their own brand of vernacular or “new popular” scenography (from the bar and curtains to their own uniforms as the locale’s barmaids) as the backdrop against which they presented a rotating

array of artworks, performances, concerts, and other events. One could name many more—indeed, the list of remarkable artist-curated exhibitions is long, and takes us from Yves Klein’s *Le Vide* (1958) to Mike Kelley’s *The Uncanny* (1993); from Barbara Kruger’s *Pictures and Promises: A Display of Advertisings, Slogans and Interventions* (1981) to Willem de Rooij’s *Intolerance* (2011); from Fred Wilson’s *Mining the Museum* (1992) to Thomas Hirschhorn’s *Musée Precaire* (2004), and still other fantastically rich examples that couldn’t be investigated in this volume, but all of which prove that artists have, from the postwar period to the present, found the exhibition an incredibly potent site of intervention.

Of course not every exhibition organized by an artist explicitly seeks to shift the terms of the exhibition as such. Some have been more than anything else about expressing an artist’s particular and unusual grounds for selection while the classical format for presentation remained stalwartly in place. And there are, conversely, a number of exhibitions made by “professional” curators (or, at least, non-artists), who for their part have managed to accomplish that task of reimagining the form of the exhibition (think of Lippard’s various “Numbers” shows, 1969–74; Siegelau’s *Xerox Book*, 1968; Gerry Schum’s *Television Exhibitions I and II*, 1969–70; and Jean-François Lyotard and Thierry Chaput’s *Les Immatériaux*, 1985). These cases can be attributed to the curator endeavoring to find an exhibition form that would respond to the nature of the work being shown, or to the fact that the curator allowed the artists, while not taking over the role of the curator per se, to have a hand in determining the exhibition. Professional curators have at times been inspired by artist-curated exhibitions and have felt challenged to rethink the exhibition’s form as a result. In other words, there are no hard-and-fast rules that distinguish the categories I deploy in order to facilitate a discussion of the subject. Things are slippery. Nevertheless, this larger project of looking at the artist as curator aims to address what has been the signal of many artist-curated shows: a gauntlet thrown down to the idea of the exhibition as a neutral arrangement of artworks in a given space and time for didactic or spectacular display.

However much this project might seem to unify the specific genre that is the artist-curated

exhibition, it does not suggest a sameness or uniformity to artists’ approaches. The examples, which the following collection of essays examines in detail, suggest that the premises that quietly support and perpetuate the most conventional notions of the “exhibition” have long been undermined by artistic practice. And while artist-curated initiatives have for too long remained under-studied, they raise the thorny issues mentioned earlier, among them questions regarding the limits of the artwork (Where does an artwork end and its context begin?), the status of the exhibition (Should an exhibition curated by an artist be considered an artwork? How is it to be evaluated in relation to an artist’s oeuvre?), and so on. Thus, this serially generated anthology of essays surveys both recent and not-so-recent examples to better reflect on how theoretical and historical notions of the exhibition have been transformed under the influence of artists. As such, this project is less about constructing a canon of “landmark” exhibitions (although this is *also* an attempt to understand what the terms and perils of that could be). It is instead more about beginning to imagine possible languages, tools, and methodologies for looking at, and talking about, how a certain kind of exhibition making advanced by artists can be studied today—alongside, but also perhaps differently from, the vast expanse of exhibitions writ large.

*The Artist as Curator*’s ambition is manifold, but it is decidedly not meant to be a rehearsal of the mythos of the curator, whether artist or not. Rather, it is an attempt to acknowledge the critical agency of operations and activities that are taken up by artists but which might not seem “artistic” in the most traditional sense. These activities reveal an acute understanding on the part of artists regarding the exhibition’s latent potential as a form to be pressed, challenged, and even undone. For the crucial task of a history of artist-curated exhibitions is to attend to the particularities not only of what was shown, but also to the form the exhibitions assumed. That form may or may not be considered an artwork, or even an exhibition, but the cases explored in this project will ask us to fundamentally reconsider what an artwork or an exhibition are—or could be.

—Elena Filipovic



1. See Patricia Mainardi, “Courbet’s Exhibitionism,” *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 118 (December 1991): 253–65. Occasional references to artist-curated exhibitions appear in broader exhibition histories (Brian O’Doherty’s *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* and Bruce Altshuler’s *The Avant Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the Twentieth Century* offer rare, early exceptions that give significant attention to the artist-curated exhibition), and there are a handful of essays, each devoted to a single artist-curated exhibition, and even a few articles on the phenomenon of the artist as curator (on all accounts, see the “Selected Bibliography” in this volume). But, surprisingly, there exists no comprehensive study surveying artist-curated exhibitions, nor any serious attempt to theorize the specificity of these exhibitions. Moreover, artist-curated exhibitions often get left out of larger art histories that still frequently favor discussions of autonomous objects.

2. The reconstruction of historic exhibitions is not new, but the Prada Foundation’s impressive recent efforts toward meticulously researching and reconstructing *When Attitudes Become Form* is both unparalleled and indicative of how woefully limited such reconstructions inevitably are. See the remarkable publication edited by Germano Celant and Chiara Costa, *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, Ca’ Corner della Regina, 2013).

3. Simon Sheikh, “A Conceptual History of Exhibition-Making,” paper presented at Former West Conference, BAK, Utrecht, November 7, 2009.

4. Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

5. See Pablo Lafuente’s suggestion of typologies as a way to historicize post-1989 exhibitions as articulated in his “Exhibition Typologies Post-1989,” paper presented at Former West Conference, BAK, Utrecht, November 7, 2009.

6. See Bruce Altshuler, *From Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions That Made Art History, Volume 1: 1863–1959* (London: Phaidon, 2008) and *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History, 1962–2002* (London: Phaidon, 2013).

7. The ambiguity of the phrase “exhibitions that made art history” seems willful: it suggests either “shows that made it into art history” or “shows that made art history what it is today”—or both.

8. Dorothea von Hantelmann, “The Curatorial Paradigm,” *Exhibitionist* 4 (June 2011): 11–12.

9. This discussion of Duchamp’s role as curator draws from my book *The Apparently Marginal Activities of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).

10. In the 1920s, and parallel with the development of museums and public collections devoted to modern art, several important examples of museum director-curators emerged, including Alexander Dorner in Europe and Alfred H. Barr Jr. in the United States, each of whom helped forge a model for what the modern curator could be. For more on the development of the notions of curator, exhibition, and museum in the modern period, see the “Selected Bibliography” in this volume.

11. It was arguably Duchamp’s pioneering stance that set the foundations for subsequent generations to develop what came to be called conceptual art’s “aesthetics of administration” (to use Benjamin Buchloh’s formulation) and institutional critique, for which curatorial and administrative tasks were a central part of artistic labor. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” *October* 55 (winter 1990): 105–43.

12. See Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 102; and Bernard Marcadé, “Concept of Nothing,” in *Voids* (Zurich: JRP|Ringier; Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2009), 236.

13. For this presentation there was specifically not supposed to be a “selection”; it was open to all comers. Yet the president of the hanging committee was pretty much as close as one can get to the “curator” in our contemporary sense.

14. No matter that the exhibition claimed to have “no jury and no prizes,” and anyone who paid the six-dollar submission fee, as R. Mutt had, was supposed to be allowed to exhibit. A urinal revealed the exhibition’s pretense of undogmatic inclusiveness to be, quite simply, a lie. Censored from the catalogue and the show, it was apparently hidden behind a wall partition where the public would not see it. And it was, so at least one story goes, lost almost as quickly as it had been chosen from among the lavatory supplies at the J. L. Mott ironwork and appliance showroom. For a collection of the most extensive research on the different accounts of *Fountain*, see William Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp/Fountain* (Houston: Menil Collection, Houston Fine Arts Press, 1989).

15. “For a period of thirty years nobody talked about them [the readymades], and neither did I,” Duchamp later admitted in “Marcel Duchamp Talking about Readymades,” interview by Philippe Collin, June 21, 1967, reprinted in Harald Szeemann, ed., *Marcel Duchamp* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 40.

16. This fact cannot be overemphasized, since so many of the art historical references to the urinal as the seminal example of Duchampian iconoclasm fail to take adequate note of its lack of publicness at the time. They treat *Fountain* as if it were, already in 1917, the art historical icon that it is today and as if one can properly speak of it without considering the fundamental role that its documentation, administration, and (delayed) representation in an exhibition (which is to say, its curation) has had on its contemporary interpretation.

17. “Pop Daddy: An Interview with Richard Hamilton by Hans Ulrich Obrist,” *Tate Magazine*, March–April 2003, <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/pop-daddy-richard-hamilton-early-exhibition>.

18. Richard Hamilton, quoted in *Fifty Years of the Future: A Chronicle of the Institute of Contemporary Art* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1998), my emphasis. See also Richard Hamilton, *Collected Words, 1953–82* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982).

19. See Sidra Stich’s descriptions of Klein’s process in *Yves Klein* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1995), 135.

20. Yves Klein, “Le Vide Performance (The Void),” lecture, Sorbonne, Paris, 1959, translated and reprinted in *Yves Klein 1928–1962: A Retrospective* (Houston: Institute for the Arts, Rice University, 1982). Read it online at <http://web.tiscali.it/nouve-aurealisme/ENG/klein5.htm>.

21. In addition to Ana Longoni’s essay on *Tucumán Arde* in this volume, see also Longoni and Mariano Mestman, *Del Di Tella a “Tucumán Arde”: Vanguardia artística y política en el ‘68 argentino* (Buenos Aires: El Cielo por Asalto, 2000).

22. Graciela Carnevale’s artist’s statement reads: “The work consists of first preparing a totally empty room, with totally empty walls. One of the walls, which was made of glass, had to be covered in order to achieve a suitably neutral space for the work to take place. In this room the participating audience, which has come together by chance for the opening, has been locked in. The door has been hermetically closed without the audience being aware of it. I have taken prisoners. The point is to allow people to enter and to prevent them from leaving. Here the work comes into being and these people are the actors. There is no possibility of escape, in fact the spectators have no choice; they are obliged, violently, to participate. Their positive or negative reaction is always a form of participation.” Graciela Carnevale, “El encierro—Project for the Experimental Art Series,” *React Feminism*, <http://www.reactfeminism.org/entry.php?l=lb&id=27&e=a>.

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This is an anthology of essays that first appeared in *The Artist as Curator*, a series that occupied eleven issues of *Mousse* from no. 41 (December 2013/January 2014) to no. 51 (December 2015/January 2016). It set out to examine what was then a profoundly influential but still under-studied phenomenon, a history that had yet to be written: the fundamental role artists have played as curators. Taking that ontologically ambiguous thing we call “the exhibition” as a critical medium, artists have often radically rethought conventional forms of exhibition making. This anthology surveys seminal examples of such exhibitions from the postwar to the present, including rare documents and illustrations. It includes an introduction and the twenty essays that first appeared in *Mousse*, a newly commissioned afterword by Hans Ulrich Obrist, and two additional essays that appear here for the first time.

With texts by Alexander Alberro, Monica Amor and Carlos Basualdo, Biljana Ciric, Ekaterina Degot, Elena Filipovic, Claire Grace, Anthony Huberman, Dean Inkster, Alhena Katsof, William Krieger, Elisabeth Lebovici, Ana Longoni, James Meyer, Isabelle Moffat, Nina Möntmann, Natalie Musteata, Sandra Skurvida, Dirk Snauwaert, Lucy Steeds, Monika Szewczyk, and Kaelen Wilson-Goldie.

Focusing on the Avant-Garde Argentinian Visual Artists Group – Mel Bochner – Marcel Broodthaers – Hank Bull, Shen Fan, Zhou Tiehai, Shi Yong, and Ding Yi – John Cage – Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, and the CalArts Feminist Art Program – Collaborative Projects Inc. (Colab) – Alice Creischer, Andreas Siekmann, and Max Jorge Hinderer – Liam Gillick and Philippe Parreno – Group Material – Richard Hamilton and Victor Pasmore – David Hammons – Martin Kippenberger – Mark Leckey – Goshka Macuga – Lucy McKenzie and Paulina Ołowska – Hélio Oiticica – Walid Raad and Akram Zaatari – Martha Rosler – Avdey Ter-Oganyan – Philippe Thomas – Andy Warhol.