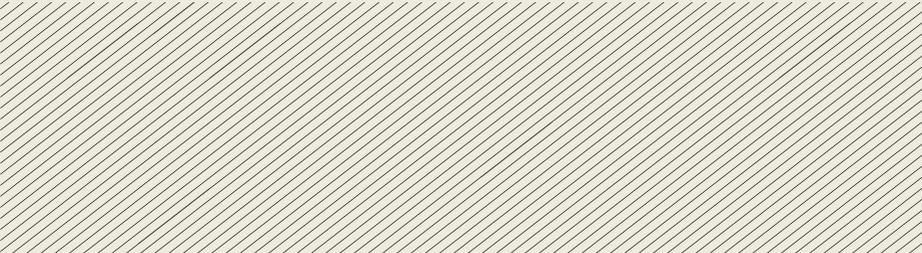


Mela*

European Museums
in an age of migrations



RF04 – Curatorial and Artistic Research



MeLa* Project

European Museums in an age of migrations

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European Commission

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March 2011 – February 2015

Acronym	MeLa*
Title	European Museums in an age of migrations
Short Description	Adopting the notion of ‘migration’ as a paradigm of the contemporary global and multicultural world, MeLa investigates the role of museums in the twenty-first century Europe. Through a focus on the transformation of museums, meant as cultural spaces, processes as well as physical places, MeLa aims at identifying innovative museum practices which respond to the challenges posed by an age characterized by intensive migration flows; fluid circulation of information, cultures and ideas, and by the political, economic and cultural process of creation and consolidation of the European Union. As people, objects, knowledge and information move at increasingly high rates, a sharper awareness of an inclusive European identity is necessary to facilitate mutual understanding and social cohesion: MeLa investigates museums and their role in building this identity. The expected outcomes of MeLa include a critic overview and a reflection on the role, mission, strategies, spaces and exhibition design for contemporary European museums. The findings of the research will coalesce into scientific publications and policies for the use of the European Union and the museum community.
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Duration	March 2011-February 2015 (48 months)
Funding scheme	Collaborative Project (CP): small and medium scale research project
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Consortium	9 partners (5 countries)
Coordinator	Politecnico di Milano
Person Responsible	Prof. Luca Basso Peressut
EU Officer	Mr. Zoltán Krasznai

* MeLa is a Sanskrit word meaning “gathering” or “to meet.” Today is used for intercultural gatherings, intended as opportunities for community building that can perform a strong socially cohesive function.

Contents

1. Executive Summary.....	9
2. Introduction.....	10
3. Key Observations.....	11
4. Implications and Recommendations.....	16
5. Public Awareness of this Research.....	18



Fig.1



Fig. 2

1. Executive Summary

The new millennium has witnessed a dramatic increase of interest in modern and contemporary art across the globe, marked by the building of spectacular new museums, the rapid expansion of international art fairs, the founding and government sponsorship of major new biennials in emerging world economies, and an ever-expanding unregulated art market, estimated in 2014 to be worth \$1.6 billion. Despite this apparently healthy state of interest, and despite significant high visitor rates, European museums of modern and contemporary art are in crisis.

Essentially defined by 20th century ideas of modernity, and governed by the principles of Modernism, the impact of globalisation, digital transformation, and changing patterns of migration, are aggressively challenging modernist ideas of how artists work, the kind of work they produce, and how it should be displayed and collected. Audiences and audience expectations are changing too - driven by instant, self-selecting access to a multiplicity of visual cultures presented by everyday technology, and accustomed to consumer cultures of contemporary designed display.

This summary publication highlights not only the challenges now facing art museums, but also the opportunities that are emerging from new types of collaboration to inform both cultural and museum policies of display, acquisition and research.

Focused on Curatorial and Artistic Research, the aim of MeLa Research Field 04 was to examine how the relationship between art, migration, and representation is being addressed in contemporary artistic and curatorial practices, and what questions this raises for artists, museums and audiences in terms of traditional concepts of 'heritage', 'the archive', and 'the art object'.

As the research concludes, the anxiety national art museums are experiencing as they grapple with narratives of nation could be productively overcome by embracing the opportunity of technology and a more fluid concept of 'heritage'. This would underpin acquisition policies that recognise expanding forms of 'intangible heritage' that equally embody the essential and protected principles of art museum collection policies - creative innovation, artistic significance and historical value.

2. Introduction

'WE CAN THINK OF THE MUSEUM IN THE 21ST CENTURY AS A NEW KIND OF MASS MEDIUM'
(CHRIS DERCON, DIRECTOR, TATE MODERN)

The research project began as an exploration of curatorial and artistic research into the history of exhibitions concerned with migration, representation and identity. It rapidly identified, however, a more fraught relation between these issues and wider urgent concerns about the current condition of contemporary art in a global context, the role of curating, the impact of the art market on curatorial practices and the museum, and the changing relation of artists to audiences.

Curating is increasingly being discussed as part of the 'fiction' of 'contemporary art', created by a complicit relation between the art market, corporate sponsorship and private patronage of the arts, through the agency of the museum. The self-contained, self-referential, modernist 'art object' of the 20th century art museum has never been so radically challenged.

New forms of art, curatorial practice and types of exhibition and project spaces are rapidly

emerging that fall outside of the market category of the contemporary, or purposefully reject it – including work with sound, music, dance, radical performance, artistic collectives, urban communities, and documentary forms of art production.

For the art museum whose role is to collect and display contemporary art as part of contemporary culture and future heritage, fundamental challenges are being posed to its way of collecting, archiving and displaying. These challenges are further exacerbated by the impact of globalisation and technological change. If the art museum is to survive the new millennium, it needs to better understand the changing conditions and nature of artistic and curatorial practice both inside and outside the museum and to anticipate the changes needed to engage with and respond to future generations of visitors.

3. Approaches and Results / Key Observations

PHASE ONE: EXHIBITION HISTORIES AND MUSEUM PRACTICES

Following a matrix analysis of the research data gathered through desktop research, an audit and historical review of contemporary art exhibitions in Europe concerned with migration, identity and representation, and workshops and interviews with artists and curators, the following research findings emerged:

Representation – Through a critical reading of colonial modernity, exhibition histories, and the emergence of new artistic subjectivities and regions for the production and dissemination of art (the 'Global South') it is clear that there is a growing consensus that the politics of representation are near exhaustion for artists (and by implication audiences) and this needs addressing in curatorial practice. The practice of targeting artists and audiences based on ethnic or racial representation invariably reproduces the conditions of difference and marginalisation that are trying to be overcome.

Exhibition – The 20th century modernist white cube gallery space has become

synonymous with the production, consumption, and global marketing of international contemporary art, creating a uniformity of display that renders the specifics of history, time and place invisible. Increasingly rejected by artists, museums are just beginning to consider the changing nature of contemporary art practice and production.

Collection and Object – The work of modern and contemporary art museums is still predominantly organised around institutional structures and modes of management rooted in the modernist museum of the 20th century, centered on the conservation and display of the single, unique modernist 'art object'. The stable identity and status of the European fine art object is being brought into question by immaterial practices and art practices of diasporic and non-Western artists.

Globalisation – The new socio-spatial and geo-political paradigm of transnationalism and its relations to art practice and curating is resulting in a new form of distributed cultural authority and displacement of Eurocentric art histories produced in the European Academy.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Despite the globalisation of the art market and proliferation of contact, artists and curators often struggle to assume and retain ownership over practice and interpretation in exhibition-making due to lack of mutual knowledge and understanding. Working collaboratively with artists supports exhibitions of contemporary relevance, audience interest, and institutional diversity.

Programming – There has been a significant increase in addressing issues of diaspora, migration, and modernity in relation to the new discourses and conditions of globalisation, and digitisation through public programming. In particular, there has been an increase in the ‘programming’ of ‘culturally diverse artists’ and of non-object based practices (in museological terms) such as performance, sound installation, film, video. This can lead both to opportunities of experimentation, but also to instrumentalisation as a means to offset policy demands and funding expectations of inclusive programming.

Education and Learning – Museums occupy a special place in the lives and imaginations of their audiences, offering knowledge and understanding in a non-instrumentalised, non-competitive,

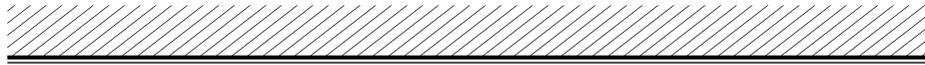
and physically safe environment. Compared to other specialist types of museums defined by a pure knowledge base, the types of learning and knowledge on offer in the art museum are as diverse as the interests of artists and the art collected and displayed. Despite prevalent curatorial modernist emphasis on the art object that ‘speaks for itself’, the rapid development and success of public programming in recent years highlights the demand for more direct learning and interaction within the art museum.

Audiences – With the rise in participatory (visual) culture and technological access to cultural engagement there has been a significant shift recorded by museum curators in the way audiences relate as individuals to artworks, rather than as members of a coherent collective public, which is presenting new challenges for curatorial practice. Despite wider social changes in cultural consumerism towards on demand, user-centered engagement, museums of modern and contemporary art are still operating in a ‘broadcast’ mode of one-to-many communication. This is clearly evident in curatorial approaches to exhibition-making.

Technology – The expansion of new media and the digitisation of the visual has resulted in the disruption of the historical status and material value of the art object which museums are struggling to address at both the practical and conceptual level of resource. Many artworks and contributions by artists working with immaterial forms such as sound, music, performance are currently not being appropriately documented or collected and can be understood within UNESCO’s 2003 terms of reference to constitute forms of ‘intangible cultural heritage’. Data content management systems need to be understood as forms of historical management of meaning and interpretation.



Fig. 6



Connoisseurial	Modernist	Transcultural
National Art Museum	Museum of Modern / Contemporary Art	Museum of the Future / 21 st Century
The Art Academy	Art Museum	Social / interactive Art Museum
Historical / Chronological Displays	Movements / Thematic Displays	Remediated Displays
Narrative Time	Periodic Time	Distributed Time
Authority of the Connoisseur	Authority of Curator	Authority of the Viewer
Canon based on History of Taste	Canon based on History of Modernism	Canon based on Inter-media Practices
Audience: Educated in Formal Culture	Audience: Educated through Formal Education	Audience: Educated through Everyday Culture

Figure 7: Table indicating historical and projected development of the art museum



PHASE TWO: COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH EXHIBITION AND PUBLICATION: TRANSFIGURATIONS

Following the interim findings of Phase One the project recognised the need to remodel itself as a practice-based, ‘problem-solving’ form of collaborative research between artists and curators to address the issues raised in and through practice.

Five artist / curator collaborations were forged in partnership with national museums and galleries in England, Spain, the Netherlands, and France which also drew on further collective professional experience gained in Germany, Portugal, Algeria, the Dutch Caribbean, and across the Middle East. For each collaboration, a particular set of questions were addressed through a joint commission which would be fully documented in process and final research material presented in a research exhibition at the Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) in June 2014.

As part of the research a publication was also produced which carried raw data from each commission to help identify points of tension,

opportunity and disconnection between the working assumptions and practices of both artists and curators. A key research objective in this phase was to examine the extent to which change itself is enacted through situated, practice-based methodology as a form of knowledge-exchange. This method has been previously termed ‘post-critical’ by the author in a previous collaborative research project.

The five collaborations were:

- MACBA in Barcelona with curator Bartomeu Marí and artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan
- Bétonsalon - Centre for art and research in Paris with curator Mélanie Bouteloup and artist Camille Henrot
- Whitechapel Gallery in London with curator Sofia Victorino and artist Kader Attia
- Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam with curators Jelle Bouwhuis / Kerstin Winking and artist Quinsy Gario
- Royal College of Art in London with curator Paul Goodwin and artist Leo Asemota



Fig. 8

4. Implications and Key Recommendations

The following recommendations are aimed at the funders, policy-makers, directors and senior curators of museums of modern and contemporary art:

Modes of Inclusion

- 1 Targeting, based on ethnicity or race and adopted as a method to achieve cultural and social inclusion in relation to both artist and audience, should be replaced by exhibition, display and collection practices that acknowledge and understand cultural identity in the 21st century as a fluid form of transcultural and transnational subjectivity.

Modes of Collecting

- 2 Increased research and knowledge-exchange should be encouraged across European museums of modern and contemporary art to establish more expansive and progressive policies on acquisition, conservation, archiving and display of contemporary artists' practices, materials, and forms that fall outside of European object-based, fine art traditions e.g.

sound, music, performance, new media.

Modes of Production

- 3 Financial and institutional resources should be prioritised and committed, particularly in times of limited financial resources, to commissioning artists and developing new models of artist / curator collaboration.

Such models should aim to increase the institutional appetite for risk to support creative innovation, cultural diversity, audience development and museological change. Good models of collaborative work may also lead to high quality new work for collection creating an effective cycle of mutual benefit.

Modes of Management

- 4 The project of digitisation should be understood as an organisational opportunity to re-examine the logic and design of content management systems in order to reflect and anticipate 21st century conditions of art production and display, knowledge generation

and interaction, and user-value. Digitisation should not be exclusively understood by museums as a form of increased access, marketing, or heritage management but as part of heritage formation.

Modes of Display

- 5 Museums need to respond to the demand for more provisional, fluid and informal types of spaces that support collaborative, project-based work, and embrace audience engagement, rather than deflect it.
- 6 Museums need to critically review the role and function of exhibition and museum design in the 21st century that acknowledges the impact of technology in mediating the art museum experience as part of everyday visual culture for both artist and audience.

Modes of Audience Development

- 7 Public programming and the expertise of education departments should be welcomed and directly incorporated into the curatorial strategies of exhibition, display

and interpretation – rather than maintained as a separate sphere of organisational activity.

Modes of Research

- 8 To effectively respond to the changes and challenges brought about through globalisation, digitisation, and the diversification of artists' practices and media, greater funding and policy emphasis needs to be placed on developing new models of collaborative, practice-led research between artists and curators, focused on exhibition and display.

Such research models would help develop a more equitable, and critically grounded relation between the work of the artist and the work of the curator, reducing conditions of difference and pre-determined forms of representation.

5. Public Awareness of this Research

Publications



Walsh, Victoria, ed. 2014. *Transfigurations: Curatorial and Artistic Research in an Age of Migrations*, London: Curating Contemporary Art Programme of the Royal College of Art



Noack, Ruth, ed. 2013. *Agency, Ambivalence, Analysis: Approaching the Museum with Migration in Mind*, Milan: Politecnico di Milano

Exhibitions

'Transfigurations: Curatorial and Artistic Research in an Age of Migrations', Royal College of Art / MACBA, Barcelona, 19-26 June 2014

'Not Dressed for Conquering - Ines Doujak's Loomshuttles / Warpaths', Royal College of Art Galleries, London, 13-21 March 2013

Book Chapters, Essays, Articles, Papers

Walsh, Victoria. 'Post Critical Museology: Practice-based Research in the Museum', in Katarzyna Murawska Muthesius, ed. 2014, *From Museum Critique to the Critical Museum*, Aldershot: Ashgate

Walsh, Victoria and Dewdney, Andrew. 'The Distributed Museum and the Crisis of European Representational Systems', in Perla Innocenti, ed. 2014, *Migrating Heritage: Experiences of Cultural Networks and Cultural Dialogue in Europe*, Aldershot: Ashgate

Dávila, Mela. 'Process vs. Product. New Paths for Archiving in the Field of Contemporary Artistic Practices', in Luca Basso Peressut and Clelia Pozzi, eds. 2012. *Museums in an Age of Migrations. Questions, Challenges, Perspectives*, Milan: Politecnico di Milano

Public Lectures / Artist Presentations / Interviews

Camille Henrot, 'The Pale Fox', Bétonsalon – Centre for art and research, Paris, 20 September 2014 (research for exhibition and lecture supported as part of MeLa project)

Abu Hamdan, Lawrence, 'Received Pronunciations', Radio Web MACBA (RWM), 5 September 2014

Abu Hamdan, Lawrence, 'Contra-Diction: Speech Against Itself', 28 August 2014, Whitechapel Gallery, London

Abu Hamdan, Lawrence, 20 June 2014, MACBA, Barcelona

Gario, Quinsy, 'A Town Called Gario', 20 June 2014, MACBA – Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona, Barcelona

Attia, Kader, lecture / performance, 1 May 2014, Whitechapel Gallery, London

Hammonds, Kit (chair), 'Whichever Europe',

14-15 March 2013, Goethe Institute and Royal College of Art, London

Walsh, Victoria, 'The Post-contemporary' (lecture), 'Let the Museum Speak: Museums in an age of Migrations', 5 September 2014, Cité Nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration, Paris

Walsh, Victoria and Dewdney, Andrew (lecture), 'Migrating Heritage – International conference', 3-4 December 2012, University of Glasgow

Walsh, Victoria (keynote lecture), 'Diversity - German Cultural Federation conference', 24-26 October 2012, Kontext kulturproduktionen, Hamburg

Research Seminars

Walsh, Victoria and Dewdney, Andrew (scientific organisation and session chairing), 'Online Collections: What has the museum learnt from the project of digitization of collections?', 2 June 2014, Tate Britain, London

Attia, Kader; Walsh, Victoria; Goodwin, Paul; Petersens, Magnus af; Victorino, Sofia, 2 May

2014, Whitechapel Gallery, London

Walsh, Victoria and Goodwin, Paul (scientific organization and session chairing), 'Issues in Curatorial and Artistic Research in an Age of Migrations', 24 February 2014, Royal College of Art, London

Noack, Ruth (panel discussion participant), 'Para/Site International Conference', 11 April 2013, Para Site, Hong Kong

Noack, Ruth (scientific organization and session chairing), 'How to do Research with Art?', 14 March 2013, Royal College of Art, London

Fisher, Jean and Crimmin, Michaela (scientific organization and session chairing), 'Art and Globalisation', 8 January – 19 March 2013, Royal College of Art, London

Nash, Mark and Lundström, Jan-Erik (speakers), 'Envisioning 21st Century Museums', 31 May 2012, Post and Tele Museum, Copenhagen. Seminar organised by CIID - Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design

Carolin, Clare and Fernández López, Olga (scientific organization and session chairing), 'Coloniality, Curating, and Contemporary Art', 20-23 March 2012, UNIA – Universidad Internacional de Andalucía, Seville. Seminar organised by the Royal College of Art and CAAC – Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo

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Illustration Credits

Figure. 1: Installation view of *Transfigurations*, MACBA Capella, 20 - 26 June 2014 © Oriol Molas

Figure. 2: Installation view of Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *Contra-Diction: speech against itself*, MACBA Capella, 20 - 26 June 2014 © Oriol Molas

Figures. 3: Research pictures and screenshots related to Camille Henrot's research index 'Atlas of the Atlas' from the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, 2013 © Camille Henrot

Figure. 4: Kader Attia, Lecture, 1 May 2014, Whitechapel Gallery, London. Courtesy Whitechapel Gallery, London

Figure. 5: *Eo ipso* (spelling and grammar check), screen shot

Figure. 6: *Conflicted Phonemes*, press conference at Casco Utrecht, 2012 © Emilio Moreno

Figure. 8: Quinsy Gario, *Zwarte Piet is Racisme*, 2011-2012 © Quinsy Gario



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Major Competences: Museum
Key Members: Bartomeu Mari, MeLa Davila



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MNHN – Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, France
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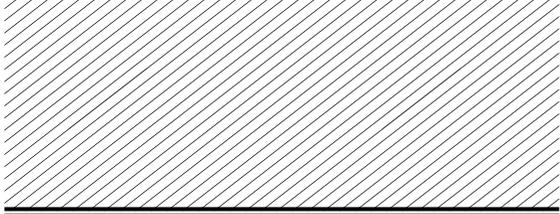
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MeLa RF04 – Curatorial and Artistic Research

How are globalisation, digital media and changing patterns of migration changing our understanding and experience of the contemporary work of art, and how are contemporary artists engaging with curators to think about the condition of the contemporary through their work, its display and collection? How are curators working with new forms of artistic production, particularly non object-based practices of making, that fall outside of conventional modernist forms of display, collection and archive? These are some of the questions examined by Research Field 04, led by the Curating Contemporary Art Programme at the Royal College of Art in London, and outlined in this brochure.

Reflecting on the challenges and opportunities of current curatorial and artistic practice, the research highlights areas of museum practice and organisation that are still rooted in the 20th century and urgently need reconsidering to ensure the cultural relevance and vibrancy of museums of modern and contemporary art in the 21st century.

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