



The Americas : Independent Artistic Practices in the Era of Globalization

Different Political Contexts

It's always surprising to recognize the serious misunderstanding that persists between the Americas, despite international agreements and treaties. The historical specificities and artistic traditions of the two hemispheres differ greatly, as do their political situations, their accords and their markets. With globalization, we hoped for the opening up of these markets and wider circulation of cultural and artistic productions. Nonetheless, we note that a still relatively small number of artists and curators from the South come to work in Northern institutions and vice-versa. The NAFTA accord (1994) established the basis for a common market between Canada, the United States and Mexico brought together by an international economic and financial treaty. The main criticism directed at this free-trade agreement was that it allowed the open circulation of goods while individuals enjoyed no such privilege. The Mercosur agreement (1994), on the other hand, created a Southern Hemisphere common market favouring, unlike the North American Free Trade Agreement, the free circulation of both goods and people via international accords agreed to by member countries.

In assessing conditions for artistic production in the United States, Mexico, Argentina or Brazil, one notes that the art world is stimulated by the diversity of the players on the ground and by a strong presence of privately-owned institutions. The rest of Latin America and the Caribbean are presently in the midst of a movement for the privatization of public institutions, coupled with a strong freeing-up of artistic expression. Despite these disparities, Latin America is also marked by a renewal of leftist political movements. Moreover, it appears as if South America understands self-renewal and is enjoying the positive impact of relative economic growth on artistic production. Biennales in Havana, Mercosul (Porto Alegre), and Sao Paolo contribute to these changes by being real launching points to the international scene for Latino-American artists. Also, the most dynamic players in these regions initiate new relationships by taking advantage of international agreements to better communicate with each other.

In Canada and Quebec the landscape is entirely different. State funding of culture is essential to awareness of artistic activity, cultural institutions and organizations, due to the relative rarity of private philanthropic initiatives. The effectiveness of the public model, however, has been called into question, with political officials tending to divert public cultural policy through the addition of *performance* criteria. We are presently witnessing the emergence of a *client-based* culture similar to that which overtook our health and educational systems.

Local Initiatives and Communities of Interest

This rapidly-outlined situation demonstrates the many challenges to be met if one wishes to take part in a global cultural system. The RCAAQ's desire, in putting together this Conference, is to take stock of the local experiences and initiatives that impact methods of production and distribution, as well as the contexts for creating work in the Americas today. Our intention is to allow Conference participants to meet the most representative interlocutors from the Americas' artistic scenes and to understand the stakes and factors both distinguishing and uniting them.

In effect, and against all expectation, globalization favours the emergence of artists' initiatives, from diverse regions, spontaneously joining their actions and experiences to the needs of their communities. We see appearing here and there more and more local self-management structures, developed along the lines of the associative models first put forward in the 1960s. This trend is a response to a global economy increasingly tending towards the uniformization of cultural production and privileging large institutions and a market-driven value for cultural products. The desire for greater organizational autonomy on the part of artists and writers aims to keep knowledge, experimentation and research closer to their practices. Artists are now more and more exposed to other influences due to biennales, festivals and other events offering them greater visibility. And, on the other hand, the increase in the diversity of residency programmes creates a proactive network within which creators may circulate, opening themselves up to other

realities that might impact their work. If the circulation of products and individuals is at the heart of the new economic order, it remains a privilege of those countries whose agreements allow for it. So, one might ask if creativity is a part of them...

One also notes that various interest-communities rapidly adopted new methods of production and distribution (the internet, public spaces, publications, etc.) that circulate knowledge differently and constitute an alternative to official systems. Collaboration by professionals from different disciplines, artists, curators, writers, cultural workers, is now seen as a way of creating ties with local arts systems. Today's residency programmes offer seminars, workshops and conferences on contemporary issues and offer studio visits with local artists. These initiatives bring together individuals who "... prefer to associate themselves with putting things in action, the support and presentation of collective processes in constructing images and stories that contribute to the formation of experimental communities"¹.

By building associative ties, these communities of interest now invite us to explore our relationship to the world differently and to assert greater autonomy of action. They encourage their members, whether artists or not, to invent diversified models that are friendlier to the development of creative practices: their production, distribution and awareness-building among new audiences find them thus better served.

Conclusion

In raising these questions for the October 2010 Conference, the participants will also touch on the role of public and private financing, as well as possible future scenarios for preserving a flourishing cultural multiplicity. Our main objective will, however, remain reevaluating how this diversity coexists in the Americas with a notion of mobility allowing one to *work on another level*.

The Conference brings together artists, writers, art historians, curators, directors of centres and museums, government officials as well as representatives of artists collectives and foundations to exchange ideas on the situation around three axes of thought:

- **What is the present situation for self-management in this context?**

- **Where are we in hosting people in residencies?**

- **How mobile are artists in the Americas?**

SAVE THE DATE : October 6th to 10th 2010

The **Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec** is pleased to host the Res Artis Conference, *The Americas : Independent Artistic Practices in the Era of Globalization*. The Conference will be held from October 6th through 10th, 2010 at the [Société des Arts Technologiques](#) and the [Monument National](#) in Montreal. The day trip to Quebec City (optional), October 10th will bring you at the [Méduse Coop](#), La Chambre Blanche and Le Lieu among other art spaces. Thanks to a special partnership with the Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference (ARCA), the whole of the artist-run centre community in both Canada and Quebec have been invited to take part and exchange ideas with members of Res Artis.

A simultaneous translation service in French / English / Spanish will be available during the keynotes and some workshops.

The Conference is open only to members of Res Artis, ARCA and the RCAAQ. Registration will be available via the websites of those organizations from April 2010.

The RCAAQ has received the support of several bodies in putting together this conference.

- Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference (ARCA)
- Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec
- Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine du Québec
- Canada Council for the Arts
- Ministère des Affaires municipales et des Régions et de l'Occupation du territoire du Québec
- Conseil des arts de Montréal
- Service du développement culturel, de la qualité du milieu de vie et de la diversité ethnoculturelle de la Ville de Montréal
- Tourisme Montréal

Several cultural partners have also associated themselves with the conference:

- La Société des Arts Technologiques (SAT)
- Monument National
- Parisian Laundry
- Quartier Éphémère / La Fonderie Darling
- The DHC/ART Foundation
- Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal
- Aboriginal curatorial collective
- esse art + opinion
- Arttexte

www.rcaaq.org

www.resartis.org

¹ Reinaldo Laddaga, « Art et organisations », in *Shifting Map. Artists' Platforms and Strategy for Cultural Diversity*, RAIN Artists' Initiatives Network, Nai Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, p. 200. (Our translation.)