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documenta.
A BRIEF HISTORY
OF AN EXHIBITION
AND ITS CONTEXTS

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The Development of Modern Contemporary Art and Curatorial Practice: documenta to dOCUMENTA (13)

The previous 13 documenta exhibitions between 1955 and 2012 can be divided into four phases, that represent artistically as well as historically and socio-politically the essential lines of development of Western society at the end of the 20th century by artistic manifestations. This process, that is reflected in four clusters, does not link linearly, but in an interplay of continuity and break, restoration and innovation. The special conflict of each documenta arises from the search movements between awareness of the past, diagnosis of the present and future orientation in aesthetic as well as social and political terms.

Reconstruction

documenta to documenta III (1955-1964)

When Arnold Bode's long-standing dream of a "major international art exhibition" finally came true with his first documenta during the National Garden Show on July 15th 1955, ten years had passed since the end of the Nazi regime and World War II. Germany was in a state of reconstruction, the economic miracle began and there was a great desire for culture. For this reason, Bode and his mastermind, the renowned art historian Werner Haftmann, were in pursuit of great goals from the very beginning:

- return the masterpieces of modernity which had been defamed and banned under the Nazi regime, from the beginning of the



Henry Moores sculpture "Big Sitting
Female Figure", II. documenta, 1959

early 20th century to the younger and middle generation in Germany;

- restore and document the continuity of modernity and the new contemporary postwar art;
- reintroduce Germany as a cultural nation in a (Western) European traditional context;
- develop a new concept of museums and exhibitions;
- establish the new aesthetic paradigm of abstraction.

In the first two documenta exhibitions (1955 and 1959) this led to the reconstruction of a European art canon by presenting the "classics" of modernity – in other words, older generations from Picasso to Kandinsky and Cézanne to Bauhaus – to a younger, curious audience. The choice of artists was especially based on the criteria abstraction, since abstraction was proclaimed as the formal language of artistic freedom, independent mind and individualism in the Cold War between West and East. While war, revolution, dictatorship, distress and exile permeated living spaces and experiences for the international artist generation born around 1900, now autonomy of art towards "social insertion" (Werner Haftmann) and the "arbitrary" were of validity again.



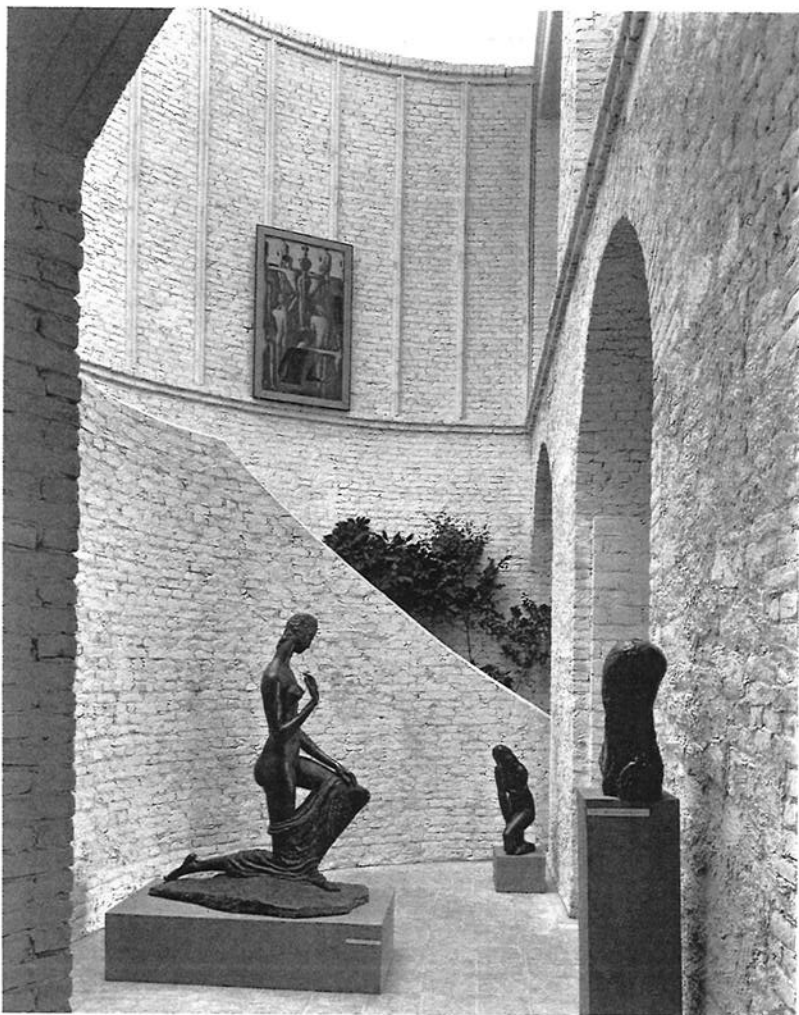
The big exhibition hall with sculptures from Berto Lardera, documenta, 1955



Example for Arnold Bodes modern presentation of art world, documenta, 1955; Exhibition café with graphic of Pablo Picasso in Museum Fridericianum, documenta, 1955

Thereby, Haftmann's aesthetic vision and Bode's art of staging created completely new spaces of art. The impact of a single artwork – be it painting, sculpture, graphic art or drawings – was to unfold in a "great conversation" towards the other artworks and the viewer. Bode shaped and staged spaces of art full of magic, pathos and beauty in the provisionally restored rooms of the Museum Fridericianum and in the ruins of the Orangery, starting at II. documenta with an admirable gift for improvisation. He made use of techniques and materials of modern fair constructions as well as product design (plastic curtains, metal) and contemporary light installations.

All of this served the effect aesthetic, permitting the individual artwork to emerge in its autonomous reference system and its dialogical orientation towards the viewer. The exhibition became the medium. It was transformed into "art of second order". The room turned into a "third place" inbetween museum and studio, a kind of temporary form of experiencing "visual understanding". Bode's innovative concept of the "Museum of 100 Days" culminated in the separation of painting and sculpture at II. documenta as well as the spectacular



The rotunda of Museum Fridericianum with Wilhelm Lehmbruck's sculpture "Knieende / Woman on her Knees", documenta, 1955

showrooms of documenta III, like the Ernst Wilhelm Nay room and the Sam Francis room. Interior or exterior space – Bode's art of staging with its subtle light effects fascinated documenta visitors.

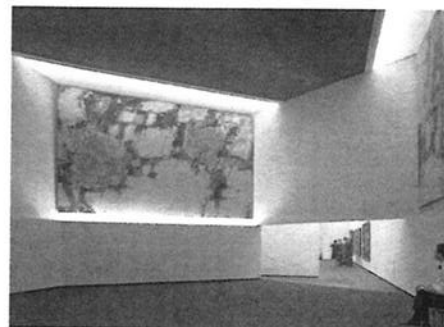
The resonance and reaction to the first documenta encouraged Bode and Haftmann to develop their basic concept of "great masters" and "great works" in the "development and European inter-



Exhibition room, Museum Fridericianum, II. documenta, 1959



Emilio Vedova, "Plurimi di Berlino", documenta III, 1964



Sam Francis, "Three Wall Paintings for the Staircase at the Kunsthalle Basel", documenta III, 1964

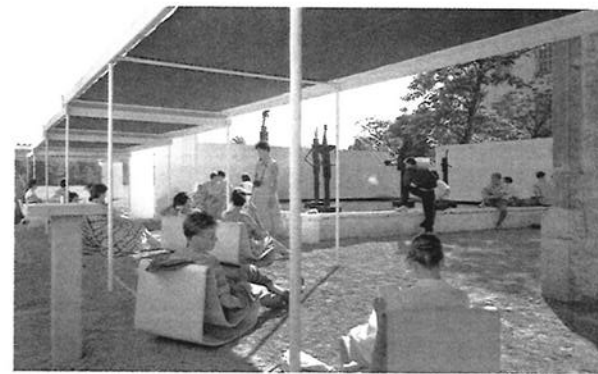
dependence of modern art". An authoritarian quality demand and a formation of canon that set standards remained equally obligatory for the gradual development of younger, contemporary postwar art. The massive American art formats by Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Sam Francis up to Robert Rauschenberg dominated documenta since II. documenta. Due to the close relationship to the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York the organisers of documenta could ensure both a representativity of their overview of the art in the 20th Century and a connection to American contemporary art after 1945.

Yet, the first editions of documenta already revealed the conflict between the subjectivity of the responsible artistic director and the objective tendencies of the respective contemporary art world which remains until today. From the very beginning, Bode and Haftmann omitted important positions of realism, the German postwar modernity was completely focused on abstract art of Nay, Winter or Baumeister.

This aesthetic reduction reached its limits by the time of documenta III at the latest. The international art criticism regretted the absence of the rapidly expanding Anglo-America pop art and the tendencies of a new realism and an avant-garde aesthetic.

Though, this new era could be experienced through innovative stagings of spatial installations and an event-character that was specially promoted by Bode, but on its own documenta III simultaneously marked the end of an art and exhibition era that was still of museum and highly festive character.

The radical transformation from modernity to contemporary art was not at the top of the agenda. Arnold Bode and Werner Haftmann achieved their founding mission: to give documenta the authority of a forum of modern and contemporary international art – and to develop a new, innovative type of a large-scale exhibition for an international and local audience with documenta.



Sculpture pavilion in front of the Orangery with Pablo Picasso's "Les Baigneurs", II. documenta, 1959



Hand Drawing, documenta III, 1964

Ernst Wilhelm Nay Room, "documenta-Bilder A, B und C / documenta Paintings A, B and C", documenta III, 1964

Transformation

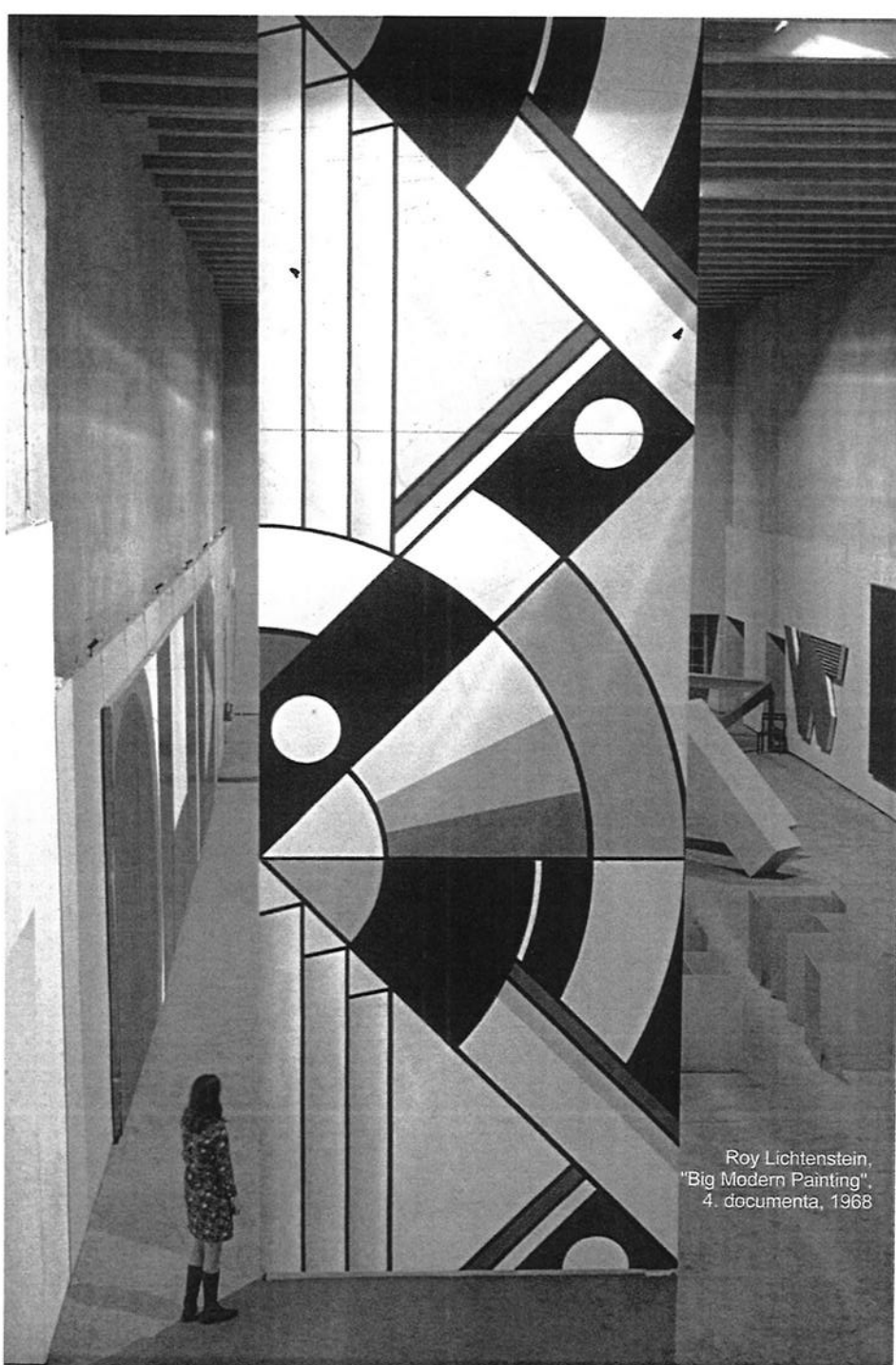
4. documenta to documenta 6 (1968-1977)

Artistic positions, understanding of art and aesthetics of the Western world radically changed with the great social, political and cultural conflicts of the sixties. New spaces of art opened towards the social, the urban, the daily and the performative. The restored Western industrial societies with their prosperity, their political and cultural institutions were confronted by student protests, fundamental criticism and provocative "counter culture".

At the same time old and new mass media such as photography, film, television and video but also commercials, posters, performance art, kitsch, comics and street art became an integral part of the art world. In connection with avant-garde music and transdisciplinarity, especially the convergence of visual and performing arts led to new formats of presentation such as happening and action teaching. Art equally disrupted all enclosing and confining physical, institutional and aesthetic spaces.

With 4. documenta a young contemporary art tried to finally liberate itself from authorities and positions of modernism. Now the open-process-oriented, the immediate confrontation with social realities, provocation and shock, participation and emancipation became artistic practice rather than the festive, pathos formulas or fixation on painting and sculpture in staged rooms. This artistic revolution in Europe and the USA in the name of pop art, Fluxus, concept art, happening, video art, environment, land art and installations sought spaces outside of museums and galleries.

The valid work and viewer aesthetics dissolved into a new paradigm of event aesthetics. Aesthetics of genius with the idea of the individual masterpiece and the autonomy of art were no longer on the agenda, but a "counter culture" and "anti"-art that sometimes



Roy Lichtenstein,
"Big Modern Painting",
4. documenta, 1968

considered itself critical of consumerism, sometimes affirmative as a culture for the masses, as a new political agitprop art or as a "social sculpture" (Joseph Beuys). The age of "popular" arts and rapidly changing youth cultures demanded a determined contemporary relevance. The signs pointed towards rebellion and departure, underground and anti-establishment. The end of painting and sculpture was proclaimed, the new keywords were object, concept, media, and pop art. 4. documenta finally became the turning and starting point of culmination of the artistic and social reform movement.

Although Arnold Bode still acted as the official artistic director of 4. documenta, the younger people around Jean Leering already had assumed parts of the exhibition presentation. Accompanied by massive protests of non-considered Fluxus artists the "pop art documenta" advanced into a sort of art festival in its sense of atmosphere and staging, similar to the first rock festivals in the USA (Monterey 1967, Woodstock 1969). The way was paved for the format of spectacular, transdisciplinary blockbuster exhibitions which satisfied both the desire for entertainment and innovation in an unconventional way.

documenta was finally a processual-performative and participatory event. In 1972 the new type of independent curator arrived at documenta with the Swiss curator Harald Szeemann who had earlier been appointed by Arnold Bode. Bode and his team were exhibition makers and scientists. Through his documenta 5 Harald Szeemann formed the profession of a curator as an equal author-artist-principal. After the democratic decision making processes and protests of the "young", with Szeemann a generation change took place and at the same time the principle of the solely responsible artistic director, which is valid until today, was cemented.

Szeemann transformed documenta into an obstacle course, a labyrinth of spectacular events. He also introduced the concept of questioning-reflexive theme-based exhibitions. As a "director of ideas" (Petra Kipphoff) Szeemann searched for "image worlds" and "real-

ity levels" in his present, looking for the generally comprehensible in the radically subjective and postulating the unity of reflexion and realisation. Szeemann's "event documenta" placed an emphasis on ambiguity and overview, "critic – information – documentation" were seen as essential fields of curation. It was a matter of "individual mythologies" and a "school of vision" for which Szeemann completely broke with the last conventions of the concept of art.

The open, encyclopedic concept of art now reached from "trivial realism", "political propaganda", kitsch, commercials, audiovisual media and science fiction to product design. For the visitors, documenta 5 turned into a "training field for perceiving reality" (Harald Kimpel) and for the art criticism, a battle ground of constant controversies over the status of contemporary art and stagings of exhibitions.

All of the following documenta exhibitions now either directly or indirectly moved in the polar curatorial charged relationship that Bode and Szeemann had defined. Manfred Schneckenburger's documenta 6 in 1977 was already very well aware of this burden, especially since the great aesthetic and political battles already seemed won. The last stirrings of the punk movement could not hide the indices of fatigue and resignation after the fundamental artistic and cultural turmoil. For this reason, documenta 6 deliberately refused any programmatic subject focus or stylistic-aesthetic aspiration for innovation. Rather, documenta 6 saw itself as a guide and regulating exhibition in the midst of a chaotic art scene that focused on novelties.

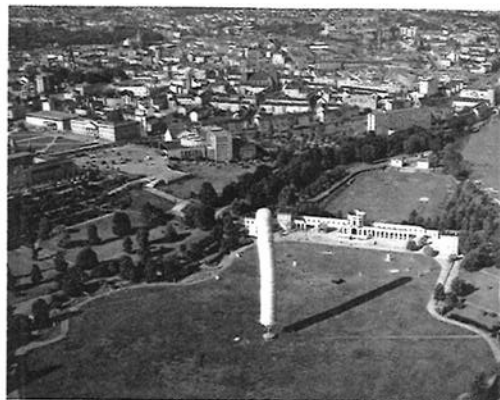
Schneckenburger tried to systematise the new forms and formats in order to open them for a central field of future art discourses: artistic media reflection and media criticism. Thereby, a decade of permanent radical transformations ended with a form of balancing inventory and in order to simultaneously set the overall theme for the next decades in a width and variety that had never been seen before: art – media – reality. documenta 6 not only enabled new media (especially video),

after an opulent retrospective on the "old" medium photography it was finally recognised as an independent art format.

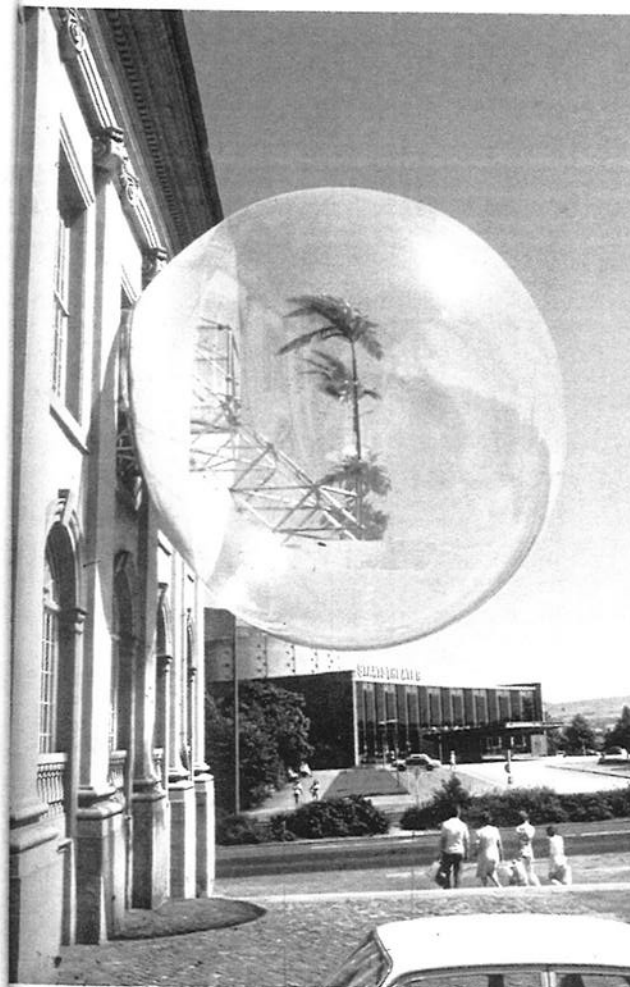
Beuys shaped documenta as no other of the 1,500 artists in 60 years of documenta did and was equally identified with the exhibition. Noone compelled art to the social, political and ecological in such a permanent and sustainable way as Beuys did, and no other artist so radically devoted himself to a dream of collective creativity.



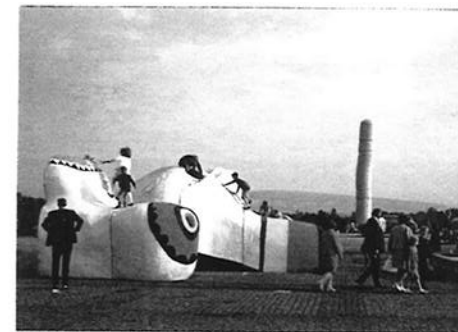
Student protestors on the way to the opening of 4. documenta in front of the New Gallery, 4. documenta, 1968



Christo, "5,600 Cubic-meter Package", 4. documenta, 1968

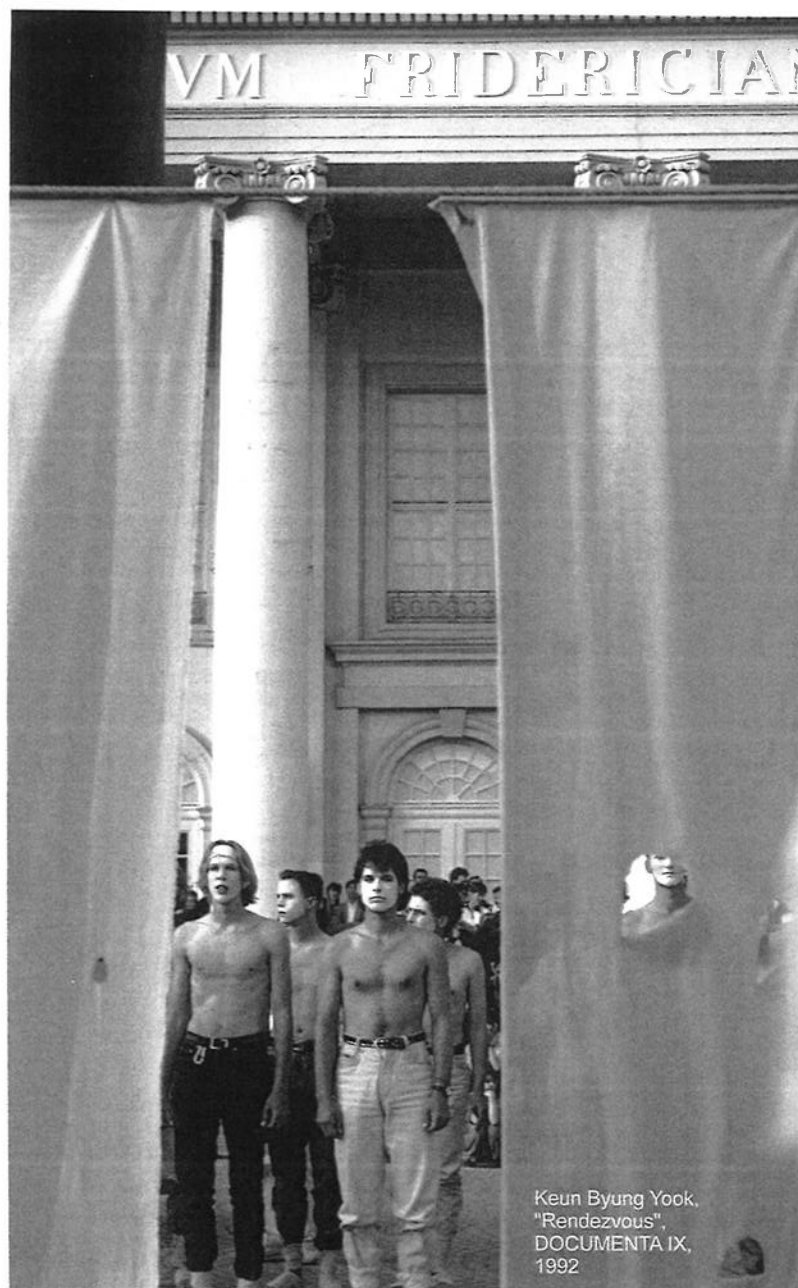


Haus-Rucker-Co, "Oase No. 7", documenta 5, 1972



Niki de Saint Phalle, "Lysistrata", 4. documenta, 1968;

Tom Wesselmann, "Great American Nude No. 98 (5 pieces)", 4. documenta, 1968



Keun Byung Yook,
"Rendezvous",
DOCUMENTA IX,
1992

Anything Goes

documenta 7 to DOCUMENTA IX (1982-1992)

"The end of avant-garde" (Manfred Schneckeburger) had already been proclaimed by documenta 6 in 1977. This complies with the general zeitgeist of an "end of history" or "end of modernism". In the eighties, the peak of the prosperity development of Western states after World War II, the post-industrial society changed into an "event society" focused on individualism, consumption, leisure and entertainment. The extensive aestheticisation of the lifeworld (urban spaces, conversion of factories into "creative hubs", etc.) is a manifestation of the postmodern understanding of the world: pluralism, lifestyle orientation, openness, style eclecticism, patchwork identities, cultural relativism. The end of "Grand Narratives" (Jean-François Lyotard) and systems accompanied a playful handling of heterogeneity, coincidence and a non-binding character. Affectivity, emotionality, colourfulness, design, recombination, sampling and cross-over were aesthetic identification marks of the new sense of time and life.

As always, documenta became a seismograph and expression of this development. In the sign of postmodernism, all three documenta exhibitions refused any theoretical, thematic or programmatic worldview availment in very different ways. Simultaneously, one looked backwards again for the first time since the late sixties.

Exhibition aesthetics that had been founded by Bode were deliberately quoted. Beuys and his projects and ideas remained present as an iconic figure long past his death (1986). The written-off art of painting saw a resurrection with the "New Wild Ones" or neo-expressionists.

The traditional institution of the museum returned to glory in the growing complexity of styles and tendencies of a globalising art scene. Artistic innovation did not seem to be of relevance anymore, instead, "depth", "passion", "poetry" (Rudi Fuchs) and autonomy

of art was in demand again. Reflecting on an ever expanding leisure and event culture with increasing offers, incentives and formats sustainably shaped the exhibition concepts of documenta 7 to DOCUMENTA IX. With his documenta 7, Rudi Fuchs chose the most radical visual opposing position to the changes and disruptions of the previous decades: the return to the museum as a place of shelter and concentration for an art which was endangered by the market and a limitless expansion of understanding and production.

Fuchs tried to defy the spectacular and festival bustle of the prevailing zeitgeist through "peace" and "quiet sounds". documenta 7 was to be understood and received as a "story", which refrained from the medial "overload" as well as decorative functionalisation. It was the great discourse on the role and possibilities of art in the age of technical-medial reproducibility that allowed Fuchs to restrict the spaces of art again. This gave him the reputation of a "conservative" who spoke of "dignity" and "respect" once again and who – similar to Bode – preferred the dialogical to shock and provocation.

Although Fuchs clearly aimed at a re-museumisation of art, documenta 7 is associated with spectacular public art projects such as Claes Oldenburg's "Pickaxe" and Joseph Beuys' "7000 Oaks" as the first monumental ecological art project, that characterises Kassel until today.

Similarly, Manfred Schneckenburgers second documenta, documenta 8, tied in with the rejectionist attitude of documenta 7 towards the great theoretical and aesthetics concepts. However, in comparison to Fuchs, this was not combined with an apolitical stance, on the contrary: Schneckenburger transferred the media-critical discourse of his documenta 6 into a rather general sociopolitical finding. In retrospect documenta 8 seems like a recombination of social and societal positionings of art from the previous decades with postmodern border crossings of genres and formats. The artists created their own spaces which in turn were questioned as pure spaces of art.

It was a staged play with the museum, with the social and the his-

Joseph Beuys'
project "7000
Oaks", basalt steles
in front of Museum
Fridericianum,
documenta 7, 1982.



torical. Art now penetrated urban, social and political spaces. This intervention was underlined by performances and design as well as the expansion into the urban space with partly spectacular objects and installations. Similar to documenta 7, one also spoke of "event spaces", which traversed inner and outer spaces like passages. Scepticism, reflection and show were in an atmospherical balance, while the curatorial concept tried to combine artistic plurality with critical diagnosis of time.

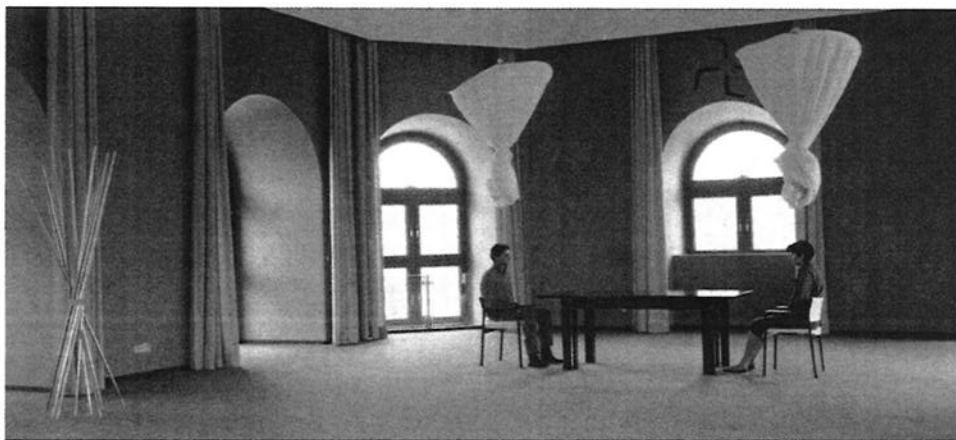
In 1992, at the end of the postmodern era, shortly after the epochal historical turning point around 1990, Jan Hoet celebrated a spectacular exhibition event with his DOCUMENTA IX which chose to present neither concept nor theory. Hoet tied in with Harald Szeemann's understanding of the role of artistic director and staged himself with his DOCUMENTA IX. With Hoet the curator advanced to become director, showmaster, omnipresent intermediary who serviced the societal air of art as he did entertainment and a longing for spectacular art projects. The exhibition was no longer only a medium, but a social event – a documenta for all!

With Hoet, documenta started to penetrate multiple new dimensions. Over 600,000 visitors meant a doubling since 1982 and for

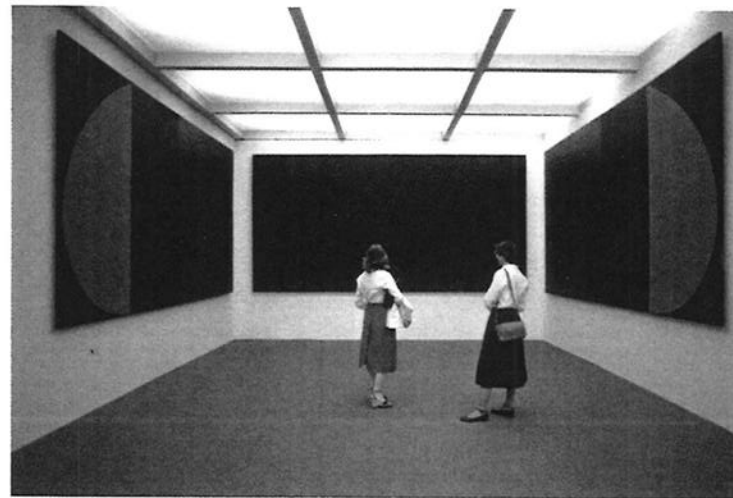
the first time the principle of large-scale preparatory conferences and events was applied, so that the **medial hype** around documenta started a year before the opening. documenta expanded across the entire City of Kassel and with a choice of artists from **36 different countries the age of globalisation had begun.**

Hoet played with the media and the public expectation in very diverse roles, with constantly interchanging identities. As a dreamer, entertainer or intellectual he composed a labyrinthine obstacle course full of paradox. **The entire confusion of the art market could be found in his extensive curatorial arrangements.** Radical subjectivity, deliberate emotionalisation and physical stimulation of the visitor delighted the art tourists far more than the art critics. DOCUMENTA IX turned into the most popular documenta to this point: the cheerful-casual atmosphere, spectacular works of art, the anti-didactical effortlessness of the concept once again refer to the core characteristics of a postmodern event society.

Ulay & Marina Abramović,
"Nightsea Crossing", documenta 7, 1982



Overall View and Exhibition Staging, Orangery, documenta 7, 1982



Alberto Burri, "Grande Rosso Nero Rosso", Orangery, documenta 7, 1982

Global Discourse

documenta X to dOCUMENTA (13) (1997-2012)

After Jan Hoet's DOCUMENTA IX the actual functional change of the world exhibition begins. Despite radical paradigm shifts since 4. documenta in the late sixties, documenta always stayed true to the original concept founded by Bode: "to create the possibility to reach for the state of affairs every five years" (Catherine David). These changing "statements" on, or the temporary balancing of, the state of art in the world had worn off no later than the nineties. It was time to redefine the art world and to rethink documenta.

The political upheavals in Europe, the new geopolitical constellations in the Arabic region and in Asia demonstrated the power and strength of historical processes. The return of history in form of peaceful revolutions, but also war, civil war and postcolonial permanent conflict affected the world as much as the era of the web and digitalisation did. Euphoria of the early nineties was followed by uncertainty, reflection and the need for orientation in terms of fundamental questions concerning the present. Questioning one's own time was connected to searching for answers in one's historical past. In society as in the arts, a phase of balancing began, a "centennial exhibition" on modernism and its consequences.

Although phenomena such as globalisation and theories such as "postcolonial studies" were not really new, they came into focus of artistic research and debate with the "turn of the century". Coining of theories, scientification of art, discourses, texts and lectures became an integral part of the art world and its institutions. Catherine David's documenta X in 1997 therefore considered itself a "cultural manifestation" at the threshold of the 20th and 21st century. Since the end of the sixties, no other documenta had so very decidedly distanced itself from the preceding exhibition, even demarcated it-



Franz West, "Doku-Chair" for the lecture event
"100 Days 100 Guests", documenta X, 1997

self, as Catherine David's did from that of Jan Hoet. David's view of the unfinished project modernism enucleated the crisis as a leitmotif.

Catherine David turned documenta into a conceptual and discourse space of past, present and future of a global world. In their interconnection, "politics" and "poetics" defined the curatorial concept: the exhibition as the text, in which art contributes to a "legibility of the world" (Hans Blumenberg) and addresses the "fundamental questions of the present". In a vehement rejection of the art market, David focused on intellectual penetration, theoretical foundations and a variety of "lectures" that replaced the show value of an exhibition with recognition and reflection. From the very beginning, David emphasised the historical space in which her "documenta of transition" was to range. At the same time, in a global world, she tried to clarify the exemplary of local, narrow geographical spaces, in order to map out heterogeneity of forms. This procedure corresponded with the idea of thinking spaces that understood the "exchange of ideas" and "debates" as integral parts of the exhibition.

Display, show, thinking and discourse spaces: David's documenta X sounded out the barriers of an exhibition itself. This seems symbolic of the situation around the turn of the century. For the first time one questioned media-technological change: What is real, what is virtual? Through Catherine David the understanding of the role of the curator was extended by the position of the intellectual, which strictly demarcated from Harald Szeemann or Jan Hoet by refusing the "self-presentation" as an author-subject. David's stance as artistic director therefore aims at embodying a "cultural position" that articulates in a medial-communicative way. Beyond the exhibition concept especially the text-intensive catalogues, that now can be compared to scientific compendia, expressed this.

Encyclopedic compendia, obstacle course and platform are the spatial basic formats of documenta that in terms of staging and

composition at times are more inclined to the experience and event space and then are more inclined to the lecture and discourse space. In the first documenta of the 21st century (2002), Okwui Enwezor very precisely continued the idea of the discursive platform as a leitmotif. As a "poet", "critic" and "curator" he was not only the first artistic director of African descent, but for the first time documenta also started with public and global "investigations" in March 2001, a year before the opening. In very close connection to Catherine David, Documenta11 became a conference about the "current interrelations between art, politics and society" in a postcolonial and global world. A transcontinental discourse-network was drawn from Vienna to Berlin (Europe) to India (New Delhi), to the Caribbean (St. Lucia) and to Nigeria (Lagos): four platforms – four investigations on central topics of the present.

Documenta11 was the fifth platform in which all ideas and movements, that had been previously initiated, arrived and were brought into exchange. Enwezor compared his documenta concept with a train station in which trains arrive from all destinations, but also leave again. For his documenta as a connecting space and transitional place of artistic-intellectual exchange for continents, Enwezor found new, socially loaded urban spaces. At Documenta11 cultural manifestation was joined by political manifestation, which was artistically articulated through media art and installations. Catherine David and Harald Szeemann were the benchmarks through their eventfulness and discursivity. And yet, as a moderator and linker of network structures, Enwezor found his very own curatorial role model.

Here, documenta finds its point of culmination as a "local history of globalisation" (Hans Eichel). The exhibition spaces of documenta (interior as well as exterior) now coincide with the political, social and cultural exterior spaces of a global world. documenta is part of the world and the world leaves copious artistic and discursive traces at

documenta. This settlement and powerful manifestation was temporarily the last of its kind and the subsequent exhibitions had to use it as a point of orientation. What could documenta achieve after 2002, where could and should documenta go from there?

At documenta 12 and dOCUMENTA (13) Roger M. Buergel and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev looked for their very own artistic-curatorial answers without having to completely redefine the spaces of documenta. They found their own "narratives" that individually interpret the state of arts in the world. Roger M. Buergel accentuated his curatorial concept with one essential question: "The Migration of Form". He assumed that aesthetic experiences help to "withstand tensions and complexity" in crisis-ridden times of change such as in the beginning of the 21st century. "Forms and topics" are able to correspond in artificial contexts and therefore demonstrate contexts and "spaces of resonance" that create completely new and unfamiliar force fields. documenta 12 refused any geopolitical identity ascription ("art from Africa") and canonisation of artists and styles.

This was a curatorial attempt at a clean break in order to reach a level in which "art can start weaving its own webs once again" (Roger M. Buergel/Ruth Noack). Curation was to refocus on composition of aesthetic correspondances and context of meaning to refer to the world in an artistic way – the exhibition as the medium of a counter-world, which gives answers to elementary and existential questions: "Is modernity our antiquity? What is bare life? What is to be done?"

This ambitious curatorial self-denial was followed by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's curatorial concept of documenta (13) which poses as a retrospective potentiation of all of the significant thematic-aesthetic lines of development since documenta 5. documenta (13) also turned into an "event documenta" with great poetic passages, a "cultural manifestation" as well as a large discourse-spectacle through texts and artistic images. Similar to Enwezor, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev organised platforms in Kabul, Alexandria and

Banff (Canada) before the start of the Kassel exhibition. She also initiated a discourse series "100 Notes – 100 Thoughts" similar to David and extensively researched the boundaries of art and science, non-artistic and artistic practice. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev created the largest documenta obstacle course of all times – she serviced "brain" and "senses", aesthetics and politics.

Her documenta became a social and atmospheric event, not seen since Arnold Bode and Jan Hoet, which attracted the masses. With great fantasy she associated the local history of Kassel full of destruction and reconstruction with current wars and conflicts between Afghanistan and the Middle East. It was the documenta of authors, scientists, musicians, artists and visitors from around the whole world. Equal to a large summary, they were presented with the entire range of possibilities of contemporary art, sciences and curatorial practice: documenta as an aesthetic realm of experience, as a cultural-medial experience space, as a social event space as well as an intellectual thinking and discourse space.

Summary: Reflections on Curatorial Practice

When one looks back over the past 13 documenta exhibitions, generally – despite critical remarks to individual documenta exhibitions – it must be stated: Each exhibition since 1955 has dealt with the three questions that create a sense of identity and has given an answer: Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going? The authority of the institution documenta is not least founded on the discursive and aesthetic connection of past, present and future, independently from the respective zeitgeist. Along with its founding myth, the inseparable rooting in the apocalypses and utopias of the 20th century has kept up the historic dimension in its contemporary interpretations and updates in the medium of art and exhibition. documenta has not always been "state-of-the-art". The discussions and protests of the sixties around pop art, Fluxus, realism and figuration reveal blanks in individual cases, deliberate subjective constriction, trials and tribulations of individual artistic directors, without being able to fundamentally question the artistic authority of documenta, that is based upon continuity, self-expectation and projected sovereignty of interpretation. The unprecedented consistency of location (Kassel), time (every four or rather five years, 100 days in summer) and concept of responsibility and management (the inviolable integrity of only one artistic director and his team) ensure that the dynamics of change and pressure of novelty can focus entirely on the aesthetic, curatorial and thematic.

By evaluating the unstoppable rising catalogues and supplementary brochures, text documentations and material volumes, one will find an artist-encyclopedia of the classical and post-war modernism with increasingly global expansions, where neither any important name nor any relevant style since the end of the 19th century is missing. In retrospect, almost all significant artists were represented at documenta, even though at the latest of the sixties this was not

anymore a selection criterion. From the beginning the "force field documenta" (Roger M. Buergel) was in a charged relationship to the art market, that implicitly or explicitly demanded an attitude from each artistic director. Even if not always free from partial influence, distance or even firm rejection of art market demands belongs to the basic orientation of each documenta.

As much as the focus lies on the artists and their artworks, as much the curatorial signature of the artistic director becomes the aesthetic brand of an international exhibition of contemporary art in perception and memory. The spaces of art, that were created by Arnold Bode and his, until now, nine heirs simultaneously mark the beginning of exhibition staging practice, that turn the later so-called curatorial practice into an independent artistic form of "second order", comparable to the modern director's theatre in Europe. Although Arnold Bode, Harald Szeemann or Manfred Schneckenburger have always called themselves only artistic director or exhibition maker, still, similar to the theatre director (next to the stage designer), they enabled documenta to advance to the forum of contemporary exhibition art due to their spatial installation strategies and conceptual-thematic thinking.

Now the exhibition as independent artistic medium was equally on one level with stage and film art, literature and music. When Catherine David talks about sequences and montage, when Rudi Fuchs calls his documenta 7 a "story" or when Harald Szeemann announces his documenta to "concentrated life in exhibition format", the exhibition does not only become a medium, but an autonomous artistic event. Precisely through the heterogeneity of the individual artistic signatures an overall picture results in the course of 60 years of documenta, showing what nowadays under terms such as "curatorial turn" serves as a supposedly universally applicable category.

The Exhibition as Medium and Plot

I. Paradigms of the Curatorial

Archive research, knowledge storage	Game "Drama", staging, narration
Performance event-like nature, action, movement, process	Conversation encounter, communication

II. Practices of Curating

Questioning time, searching for and finding topics, choosing objects, tying connections, combining knowledge, exploring spaces, make arrangements and stage them, give instructions (gestures of showing, leading recipients), organize exchange processes, create contact zones, "aesthetic sociality" (Andreas Reckwitz)

→ criticism, information, situation, documentation (Harald Szeemann)

III. Typecasting of the Curator

author, dramaturg, director, choreographer, composer, scenographer, researcher, producer

IV. Spaces of Curating

thinking space (aesthetic, social) experience space

discourse-event space art showroom

V. Development Processes of Curating

– question – search – approach – reflect – methods
 – terms – semantics – articulation – themes – combinational imagination
 – confrontations – constellations – documentations – associations
 – texts – contexts – connection – realisation – occurrence – intervention
 – subjectivity – experience – participation – irritation – processual

VI. Exhibition as...

medium – text – score – scene – process

This multifaceted development and framework of curatorial practice outlined here could only evolve under the unprecedented production conditions of documenta. Years of preparation time, complete freedom relative to the thematic focus and choice of artists, full independence in terms of team structure next to a core funding by the City of Kassel, the State of Hesse and the German Federal Cultural Foundation assure the artistic direction research and working conditions, that are similar to a laboratory. Given that each documenta can reinvent itself, continuous development possibilities and a basic option towards the experimental, the radical subjective in objective constellations arise. Despite regular conflicts, confrontations, economic discussions and artistic criticism, that almost belonged to each documenta, the authority of documenta originates more than ever from this unlimited artistic and curatorial freedom.

And out of this connection of medium, event and discourse, which is defined by freedom, documenta as an institution receives its openness, its constant learning capability and capacity – just like the artistic director of documenta 14, Adam Szymczyk states it so succinctly and appositely: "documenta is a thinking organism, trying to understand the world that surrounds us."