

Griselda Pollock and Joyce Zemans, eds., *Museums After Modernism: Strategies of Engagement*. Malden, MA, and Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2007, 272 pp., 49 illus., \$99.99 Cdn. hardcover, \$41.99 paperback

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Museums After Modernism: Strategies of Engagement, edited by Griselda Pollock and Joyce Zemans, is part of Blackwell Publishing's series *New Interventions in Art History*. As such, one expects that the various essays in this collection will provide fresh perspectives on how one might think about museums in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. It does not disappoint. It is only in the past thirty years or so that there has been sustained serious critical attention to museums through the field of museum studies, and, as most museum visitors and professionals will admit, there is still work to do. The authors in this volume set about to do this work. Pollock and Zemans have assembled twelve essays by art historians, artists, curators, museum educators, and anthropologists, providing a broad range of perspectives and approaches to this topic.

The two overarching frameworks for this collection are evident in its title, and are the subject of the introduction by Pollock and Zemans. The first is explicit. What are museums to do now that the model of presentation and audience engagement established for museums during modernism are no longer viable? Pollock's chapter, "Un-framing the Modern: Critical Space/Public Possibility," expands on this theme and establishes the larger historical context for the broad questions asked in this anthology. The second framework, more implicitly referenced in the subtitle, pays homage to the work of Judith Mastai, to whom this book is dedicated. Growing out of a symposium held in 2002, shortly after the untimely death of Mastai, this collection seeks not only to honour her memory and her work of "performing a new institutional subjectivity" (p. ix), but also to further that work. Her work was a series of engagements and strategic interventions into museum culture, and two of Mastai's own writings are included. The second of these two essays, "'Anxious Dust': History and Repression in the Archives of Mary Kelly," a commentary on her collaboration with Mary Kelly in creating the exhibition *Social Process, Collaborative Action: Mary Kelly 1970–75* (1997), fits the least well in this anthology, but it models an important approach—interdisciplinarity—that informs other individual essays. Mastai notes: "[Kelly] is an artist and her work is making art; mine, as a curator, was to make a place of the work in relation to its history" (p. 187). Here is the acknowledgment that in order to achieve true interdisciplinary work, a collaborative effort in which each party can bring her expertise to the table is needed. Through such joint efforts, and through bringing together various areas of knowledge, successful interventions can be enacted. It is this bringing together that Pollock and Zemans achieve with this book.

This collection intervenes in art-historical discourses around museum studies: it is not simply a critique of museum practices or merely a collection of musings on the current state of museums and their possible futures. Almost every author offers a concrete discussion of the ways in which certain programs, art works, exhibitions, and interpretations can address the problems one encounters in museums. Most specifically, the essays engage ideas about the museum's public, asking questions about how a museum can create a truly public space, one in which its myriad audiences connect with art in meaningful ways to help them to think critically about the past, present, and future. The range of possibilities offered in these essays is inspirational and refreshing. Indeed, these are important, exciting, and helpful essays for those interested in museums and their audiences. That said, however, it should be noted that this collection is limited to a European and North American context. Ruth Phillips's essay on African art is the only one that even touches on art produced outside of this geographic context. One cannot help but wonder what a curator or educator based in Africa or Asia might have to say on this subject and how that might offer possibilities for further interventions.

Two of the strongest essays come from Mieke Bal and Reesa Greenberg, who treat specific exhibitions in well-written and engaging essays. In "Women's Rembrandt," Bal looks at the exhibition *Rembrandt's Women* and offers an alternative reading of the interpretations presented in this exhibition. She takes what she sees as the four "axioms of art history"—history, intention [of the artist], the work of art, and the oeuvre—and expands on them to shift perspectives and to open up new ways for understanding Rembrandt's paintings. In providing this interpretative model, she urges readers to consider how the past can be meaningful for today. Bal takes us carefully through an analysis of several paintings, demonstrating how to open and to expand previous interpretations of Rembrandt's work. In demonstrating how one might intervene in art-historical interpretation and in emphasizing that "the act of viewing is an accountable cultural act performed by each of us in the present" (p. 49), she reveals how a museum exhibition can become more meaningful and relevant to contemporary audiences. In her essay, "Mirroring Evil, Evil Mirrored: Timing, Trauma, and Temporary Exhibitions," Greenberg looks at the ways museums can engage with difficult topics, not by presenting a hegemonic view, but rather by producing a space where dialogue might occur. She explores the *Mirroring Evil* exhibition mounted by the Jewish Museum in New York in March 2002—an exhibition that was controversial and not well received. In her thoughtful analysis of its content, display strategies, and the timing of the exhibition, Greenberg argues convincingly for why and how this exhibition was, in fact, a successful intervention in museum exhibitions.

Where Greenberg looks at the issue of trauma as it is engaged in a specific exhibition, Vera Frenkel and Mary Kelly contribute essays that engage with the issue from the perspective of an artist. Frenkel's essay, "A Place for Uncertainty: Towards a New Kind of Museum," is a general consideration of how artists and museums can represent trauma and provide a space for contemplation of its effects, and she offers the work of four authors as important sources for understanding the possibilities of this topic. While the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to such topics and the relevance of these authors' work are made evident in her discussion, her use of too many quotes from other texts breaks the flow of her own writing. Frenkel's essay is the least specific of any in the collection. She states: "Consideration of how to transfer 'difficult knowledge' between generations is nowhere more sensitively addressed, in my view, than in the context of the Testimony and Historical Memory Project at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto" (p. 123). Yet, she does not give any particulars of that project. Similarly, she mentions her own artistic installations as models for the open-ended questioning she desires, but does not discuss any piece in detail. Unless one is familiar with her work, their mere mention does not help advance an understanding of the issues. Kelly, on the other hand, deals with the problems of representing trauma through a discussion of her piece *The Ballad of Kastriot Rexhepi* (2001) as an intervention in museum space through the performative gestures it demands. Kelly's is the more successful of these two contributions. (Kelly appears as author or subject in four of the twelve essays, so often that one almost thinks the collection should be dedicated to her as well). Nevertheless, both Kelly and Frenkel intervene in museum practices by calling for and promoting the need for open-ended experiences and dialogue in museum spaces. The discussion of the museum as a discursive site is also taken up by Juli Carlson in the last essay of the book. Context, she cautions, is not given but is produced, and the importance of the role played by art institutions such as museums and galleries in art-historical interpretation cannot be underestimated. She argues this by revisiting feminist art practices of the 1970s and 1980s and by critically looking at the role of the New Museum in New York as both a product and producer of feminist art discourse.

Other authors provide programmatic discussions addressing specific projects and approaches for building bridges with audiences. In "There Is No Such Thing as a Visitor," Mastai recognizes museum audiences as diverse populations with whom museums need to develop long-term relationships, and whose museum experiences depend upon the "age, gender, race, ethnicity, levels of knowledge about history, about art history, and so on" (p. 175) with which they enter the museum. In their contribution, "Reframing Participation in the Museum: A Synopated Discussion," Janna Graham and Sahdya Yasin present

one of the programs that began under Mastai's direction and that aimed to blur the boundaries between inside and outside, between curatorial authority and audience reception of curatorial knowledge. They discuss the interventions made possible by the "Teens behind the scenes" program at the Art Gallery of Ontario. In that program multiple voices enabled a broader understanding of the ways in which a specific audience interacts with the museum and its collections, and how that audience can bring new forms of culture into the museum space. Ulla Arnell, in "Riksställningar: Swedish Traveling Exhibitions," presents a series of projects in a successful exhibition program in Sweden. Her essay traces the history of Riksställningar from a temporary program to reach non-traditional and geographically remote audiences to its institutionalization and ongoing project of producing temporary, travelling exhibitions. She provides a detailed model for successfully reaching different audiences and for taking on difficult or controversial subjects. Not only is this contribution refreshing for the variety of projects it presents, but it is also inspirational in its account of a government that supports the arts and that believes art can have a major effect on the lives of citizens. As Arnell reports, Riksställningar is interested in the "possibilities of creating opinion through art" (p. 145) and has "the fundamental mandate of contributing to the protection of free speech, of promoting cultural diversity, cultural exchange with other countries, and meetings between different cultures in the home country" (p. 147). Exhibitions "should shed light on and problematize actual phenomena in society as well as cultural identity" (p. 148).

Cultural identity is just one of the issues that comes up explicitly when Western museums engage non-Western cultures. And while many museum studies anthologies include an essay on indigenous populations and their relationship to museums, such essays often appear as tokenism. Here, on the other hand, the articles that deal with Native American, First Nations, and African art and artists demonstrate how these populations can be integral to museum studies. Gerald McMaster, in "Museums and the Native Voice," exposes how artists James Luna, Rebecca Belmore, Joane Cardinal-Schubert, and Jane Ash Poitras have been able to intervene in the museological practices of ethnographic and art museums, asserting their agency and commenting on various issues of representation, power, and authority. He argues that these artistic practices are not just institutional critiques, but that the artists bring new knowledge and voices to spaces where historically they have been silenced. Ruth Phillips's timely and important contribution, "Exhibiting Africa after Modernism: Globalization, Pluralism, and Persistent Paradigms of Art and Artifact," offers a reassessment, after several decades of critique and intervention, of exhibitions of African art. She examines four permanent installations through their use of two object types: Benin plaques and Mende Sande masks.

Her thoughtful critiques suggest that museums should be doing much more than they are, yet her conclusion does not explicitly urge that. Instead she states: “Yet despite the continuing allegiance to Eurocentric installation paradigms, when we compare the new exhibits to those replaced there can be no doubt that the impacts of globalization on Western museums are no less important for the circular path they have been traveling around the globe” (p. 100). This statement importantly recognizes that, rather than existing solely as “Other,” non-Western objects and cultures are critical for Western museums’ self-understandings. But, given her insightful critique of the exhibits themselves, I felt that Phillips could have argued more strongly for further interventions.

As the preceding discussion indicates, Pollock and Zemans have brought together a range of experts who provide insights into the possibilities for museums after modernism. They include analyses of specific exhibitions, educational programs, institutional approaches, and historically marginalized voices. The authors they have included offer a broad mix of the theoretical and practical, of the historical and the contemporary. As such, this collection provides much food for thought and should be an important text for anyone interested in museum studies and/or art-historical analysis.

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Sandra Alfoldy, ed., *NeoCraft: Modernity and the Crafts*. Halifax, The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2007, 273 pp., 64 black-and-white illus., \$39.95 Cdn.

In his 2002 book *The Persistence of Craft*, Paul Greenhalgh warns, “Those cultural practices that do not engage with Modernity, which will speed and grow exponentially from now on, will be peripheral.”¹ The fifteen essays, introduction, and foreword included in *NeoCraft: Modernity and the Crafts*, edited by Sandra Alfoldy, form an articulate and cross-disciplinary response to this challenge. Published in conjunction with a conference of the same name held at NSCAD University, these essays draw on methodologies from multiple disciplines, including art/craft/design history, anthropology, philosophy, women’s studies, museum studies, and fashion theory.

As Alfoldy states in her introduction, the interdisciplinary approach was consciously applied to discover “an alternative model for accessing craft” in order to “[solidify] the discourse of craft history, theory, and critical writing” within modernity (p. xiv). Written by prominent international scholars, craftspeople, and curators, the essays are organized under five themes: Cultural Redundancy or Genre under Threat; Global Craft; Crafts and Political Economy; Invention of Tradition: Craft and Utopian Ideals; and Craft, the Senses, and New Technologies. Alfoldy, who has done much groundbreaking research into craft activity in Canada, goes on to stress the importance of incorporating international perspectives rather than focusing myopically on the Canadian context when dealing with issues of modernity. The theme of gender, also often discussed in craft writing, is not distinguished as a focus in *Neocraft*, but rather it “extends across all themes,” as feminist investigations have greatly informed each of the disciplines involved (p. xv). Alfoldy’s insightful introduction also provides a useful historical survey of decorative-art writing in the nine-

teenth century and contextualizes the essays well within the chosen themes.

The first section, “Cultural Redundancy or Genre under Threat,” features three essays that situate the crafts within modernist art discourse. This establishes a somewhat unsettling tone for the book as the reader is forced to question the precarious position that contemporary craft has occupied as a practice within modernity. In the eloquent and well-organized essay “Replacing the Myth of Modernism” (previously published in *American Craft* in 1993), Bruce Metcalfe, American jeweller and writer, sets the parameters for the discussion by defining craft practice and modernist ideology before examining how the interaction of the two have led to damaging effects for the crafts. Central to the essay is the view that contemporary craftspeople have incorporated modernist values (such as making art for art’s sake; privileging the visual experience; and the separation of art from daily life) into their practices without an understanding of the resulting negative repercussions. He states: “Transforming the craft object into autonomous art denies the ways that craft relates to real life” (p. 14). With this dismissal of non-functional art made by craftspeople, the author does not address the fact that many “craft artists,” as he calls them, do make their work about and are inspired by their craft and its function—not in denial of it. He also accuses writers about craft of borrowing “ideas uncritically” from painting and sculpture, and questions the repeated use of the words “expression” and “concept” being applied to functional craftwork as an indication of a discourse that “lacks a distinct language to describe its own practice” (p. 7). While this statement rings true in many ways, it is worthwhile to note that several books have recently been published that attempt to construct a language around craft-specific concepts.²

Larry Shiner, an American philosopher, enlarges the discussion in “The Fate of Craft” by charting the “turbulent 150 year history of the idea of craft” from Ruskin to the Bauhaus