

Art and the Market: Crisis on the global-local / glocal horizon

We (Pierre Calame, Yu Shuo and I) are very attached to a reflection about the artist's place in the city.

First of all, it is indispensable to define or redefine the notion of market in our different languages. For example, in French it first means "convention relating to supplying goods, services, values"; in a wider sense "any arrangement done with somebody" (Le Petit Robert dictionary). In English (Penguin dictionary) the first definition is "a meeting together of people for the purpose of trade, by private purchase and sale". In the artistic field, it is a misuse of the word to reduce this notion to just its speculative aspect, to auction and gallery sales.

It is another mistake to consider the only artistic demand as that of the speculators and collectors. In France, in 2008, record numbers of people visited artistic and cultural events. The economic crisis caused sales to a few people to collapse, but promoted the general population's demand for art.

Exponential growth and the ensuing crisis are acting as a spectacular play, which hides numerous artistic practices. I would like to call attention to the work of the German artist, Jochen Gerz, which is deeply integrated into the urban and social contexts in some 30 different European sites (see www.gerz.fr/), while it has almost no presence in what is conventionally called the 'art market'.

Any artwork can mark history. In the short term, the most expensive works enter publicly visible collections. Their images are then circulated. These 'market stars' therefore have a responsibility towards collective consciousness and imagination. In China, their prices are known by a seemingly important audience, while European artists often do not know whose price is the highest. For the first time, some Chinese artists now have the ability to influence not only the consciousness and imaginations of the Chinese, but of the whole world.

When thinking about supply and demand, it is relevant to ask whom we are thinking about: whose supply? Whose demand?

This roundtable has gathered representatives of three entities or areas. They are the marketplace (4), institutions (3 or 4) and artists (3 or 4). They all interact on a daily basis, which does not necessarily mean that they engage in meaningful dialogue. There are two other areas that are not represented here: the public (those who look) and the collectors (those who purchase). Two issues underlie the whole roundtable discussion:

- A) How does this interaction differ in the European and the Chinese contexts?
- B) Where do the greatest obstacles lie? Are they the differences between the situations in China and Europe, or between the three different participating parties of artists, market and institutions?

Proposed working plan for the four half-day sessions of the roundtable discussions:

- 1 Each participant presents a definition of the notions of market, the market crisis and the interactions between artist/art dealer/institution
- 2 Participants exchange roles, putting themselves in one of the others' position (for example, a Chinese artist puts himself/herself in a European art dealer's place).
- 3 Discuss hypotheses concerning the expectations of the public, of collectors.
 - Discuss propositions for improvements in art exchanges and circulation.

François Bossière, 28 February, 2009