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Strategies of Visibilization

Searching for Contact Zones between the Periphery
and Center in mumok's Exhibitions, 1998–2018

Abstract: *Strategies of Visibilization* is a spatial installation that consists of the listings of artists who participated in exhibitions at the Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien-mumok between 1998 and 2018. The installation compares proportions of participation by gender and geopolitical origin. From a subjective-critical perspective and by addressing questions about representation, positioning in the artistic field, and power relationships within the museological context, the proposal seeks to contribute to the debates about loss, mourning, and restitution of women in the Global South who have been denied a position in the art field.

About This Photo Essay

This photo essay is based on *Strategies of Visibilization*, which is a spatial installation of the complete list of artists who participated in exhibitions at the Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien- mumok between 1998 and 2018.¹ The installation was initially presented from August 31 until September 25, 2021, at Mz* Baltazar's Laboratory, a feminist creative space in Vienna (see fig. 1), and was also shown at the "De/Colonizing Knowledge" conference at the University of Vienna from November 19 to November 21 (see fig. 2), and online on December 22, 2021.

In alignment with the work of Jul Tirlor (2020), *Strategies of Visibilization* takes into consideration that racist, nationalist, right-wing populist and right-wing extremist discourses have gained visibility in recent years. Here, Pierre Bourdieu's ideas on the fundamental role of the dominant culture in

the construction of national self-image and national identity (Bourdieu 1998: 46)¹¹ and the debates on positioning, power relations, and representation in museological practices are critical, as these constructs gain relevance in this context, especially in the “exercise of looking back and projecting forward, beyond nationalisms and narrow definitions” (Fajardo-Hill and Guerrero 2017: 139). The installation is in effect an exercise that seeks to contribute to the debates about loss, mourning, and restitution of women who have been denied a position in the art field (cf. Pollock 1999: 353).

The analysis focuses on the representation of women and gender non-conforming (*) artists from the Global South at mumok. The information regarding participation was collected mainly from mumok’s archive of catalogs of around two hundred exhibitions. This photo essay compares proportions of participants by gender and geopolitical origin. In the twenty-one years between 1998 and 2018, 2,966 artists took part in exhibitions at mumok, of which 2,196 (74.04 percent) were male, 712 (24 percent) were female or gender nonconforming (*) artists from the center, and 58 (1.96 percent) were female artists from the periphery. None of the latter were found to identify as genderqueer (*) in online databases (see fig. 3).

The analysis carried out for the installation hereby shows the very limited contact zones or encounters between the periphery and the center, and dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in the artistic institution from the perspective of field theory (Bourdieu [1986] 1989, [1984] 1995, [1992] 1995, [1998] 2000, [1984] 2010; Buchholz 2016, 2018; Buchholz and Wuggenig 2005; Jurt 1995, 1998; Munder and Wuggening 2012). Contact zones can be understood along the lines proposed by Mary Louise Pratt (1991: 4)—as social spaces in which unequally situated cultures meet, clash, and conflict, often in highly asymmetrical ways that result in a bidirectional, reciprocal, and mutually constitutive struggle, and where the art world’s dominant center comprises Germany, England, France, Italy, the United States, and, at times, Switzerland, countries that are among the wealthiest in the world (Araeen [1978] 1997: 98; Quemín 2006: 543). The center and the periphery to which I refer are what I understand as relational, interdependent, and dynamic spaces that sustain one another while also shifting constantly, at times ceasing to be distinct from one another and instead coming together, as is the case when the center exhibits non-Western arts (cf. Buchholz 2018: 299) and in so doing generates “contact zones.” Dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in this context speak to strategic processes that reproduce power relations, which in turn are structured by the

canon, representation, and privilege at the center of the globalized art world. These dynamics have been analyzed by Bourdieu, for whom social fields comprise fields of power and of struggle over the maintenance or improvement of positioning within that field (Bourdieu [1984] 1995: 74). In his analysis, grounded theory captures the tensions that result from the actions and reactions of actors intent on entering or remaining in the field. In sum, “contact zones,” “periphery and center,” “dynamics of inclusion and exclusion,” and “grounded theory” come together in this essay through photography in an effort to expand on Bourdieu’s poststructuralist theories in examining the art field as a construct that reveals power struggles and power relations beyond national borders (Jurt 1995; 1998), even as deploying these concepts is proposed in order to reconfigure the power structure imposed by a long history of coloniality in a globalized world (Quijano 2000: 541).

It is my hope that efforts to embrace the rise of gender, queer, post- and de(s)colonial theories will enhance the participation of BIPOC artists in mumok exhibition programs after the period under review. The museum is responsible for providing contact zones where the public can recognize itself and reveal the connections of colonial history with contemporary art systems. It is tasked with offering spaces that are *quilombos*, a term used at the time of Portuguese colonization to describe a settlement of runaway black and indigenous slaves in Brazil. According to Denise Ferreira da Silva (2021), the *quilombo* is the reason why the creative capacities of enslaved peoples have not been completely eliminated and have survived within movements of co-optation. Just as colonial genocide did not destroy all the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, we are still here and the *quilombos* offer spaces where we can breathe.

The contemporary art museum can do justice to an ecology of worldviews, in terms of inclusion and equality at all levels, allowing us to reconnect art and everyday life as suggested by the curator Catalina Lozano (2021).

In the *Strategies of Visibilization* list, the names of female and gender-queer (*) artists of the center are marked in blue, female artists of the periphery in red, and male artists in black. The analysis embodies an approach to “doing gender” (Hassler 2017: 86), emphasizing women and gender nonconforming (*) people in the art field, more specifically, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) present in the center of the art field. Systematic empirical research shows that despite the major inclusion



Figure 1.

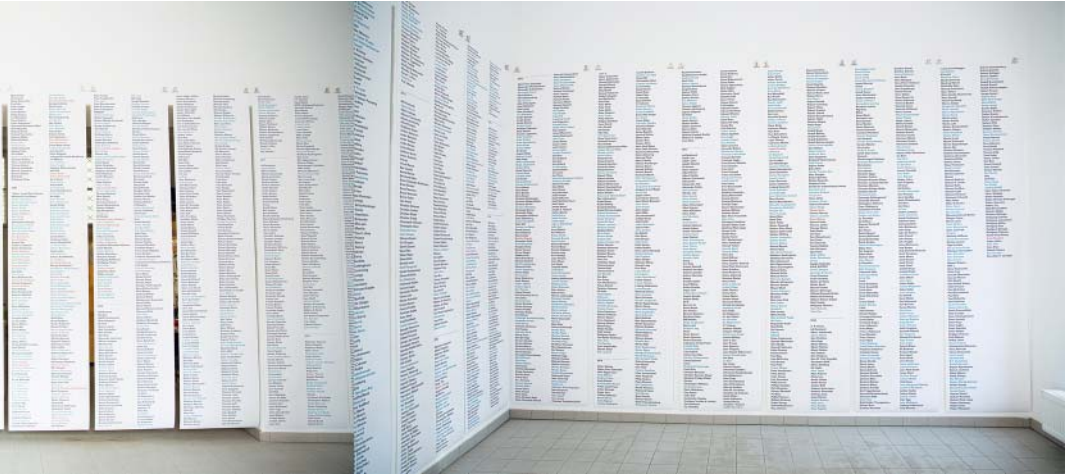


Figure 2.

of artists of the periphery, the art field continues to be dominated by artists from a few Western countries.

The categories of center and periphery of the art world partly overlap with the categories of Global North and Global South. Even fewer women artists from the Global South are represented at mumok because countries like Japan or Russia belong to the Global North but are located at the periphery of the art world in terms of exhibition spaces (fig. 3).

The first table contains the female artists from the periphery who have participated in exhibitions at mumok from 1998 to 2018. These fifty-eight artists participated in sixty-nine exhibitions (see fig. 4). Of these, the largest number came from Russia (20.28 percent), followed by Japan (13.04 percent), Macedonia (7.25 percent), and Brazil, China, and South Korea (5.8 percent each).



The second table only shows the fourteen participations of artists from the Global South, which are 20.29 percent of the total number of female artists from the periphery. China has the largest presence (four artists), followed by Brazil (four participations by three artists), Argentina (three participations by two artists), Mexico (two artists) and Iran (one artist). Twelve women from the Global South exhibited in this period, representing 0.4 percent of the total of 2,966 participations.

Of these, Latin America accounts for 12.07 percent of the peripheral artists and 0.24 percent of the total number of participations: three are from Brazil, two from Argentina, and two from Mexico.

Before the global economic collapse in 2008 (Temin 2010), twenty-eight female artists from the periphery participated in exhibitions. After this period, excluding 2009, the number of these artists dropped to ten.

Artists participating in exhibitions at mumok between 1998–2018

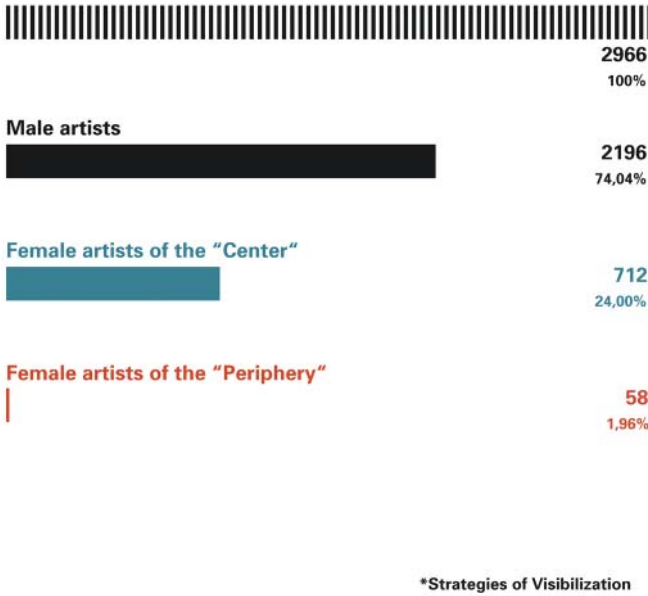


Figure 3.

In 2009, thirty-one female artists from the periphery exhibited at mumok, which might answer the question of whether a global economy in crisis positively affects the representation of BIPOC artists and could be a reason for hope for a more diverse artistic field in the future. However, this is not the case, as the participation of female artists from the periphery drops to 36 percent of the pre-crisis decade in the span between 2010 and 2018.

The diagram in Figure 5 illustrates the participations by female artists from the periphery year by year in relation to those by men and female and genderqueer (*) participations from the center (signified by the empty spaces).

In Figure 6, the photo on the left shows the installation at the University of Vienna and on the right, the exhibition at Mz* Baltazar’s laboratory.

Conclusion

In the words of Hito Steyerl ([2006] 2011: 488), “Why shouldn’t the cultural institution be at least as representative as parliamentary democracy? Why shouldn’t it include, for example, women in its canon, if women were at

1998	2009	1998	2009
Graciela Iturbide Han Myong-ok LEE Bul Nora Aslan	Aidan Salakhova Ana Baranovici Ana Temkova Aneta Svetieva Anita Arakelyan Arax Nerkararyan Arevik Arevshatyan Armine Kalentz Elena Elagina Elena Kovylyina Gordana Andelić-Gali Irina Abjandadze Iskra Dimitrova Jelena Radić Jelena Tomašević Lyudmila Gorlova Marcela Astorga Maria Konstantinova Merita Harxhi Koci Minerva Cuevas Natalia Persina-Yakinir Nurhan Oehaja Olga Egorova Ozana Brković Simona Sokhranskay Tatyana Antoshina Valentina Rusu-Cioba Varvara Sadovskaya Violeta Čapovska Žaneta Vangeli Zora Petrović	Graciela Iturbide Nora Aslan	
1999		1999	
LEE Bul Rochelle Costi Vera Olga Bozickovic-Popovic Zaneta Vangeli		Rochelle Costi	
2000		2000	
Fernanda Gomes LEE Bul		Fernanda Gomes	Marcela Astorga
2001		2001	Minerva Cuevas
Rochelle Costi Yayoi Kusama		Rochelle Costi	
2002		2002	
Mieko Shiomi Takako Saito			
2003		2003	
Volga Maslouskaya	2010		2010
	Gail Hastings		
2004		2004	
2005	2011	2005	2011
Antonina Sofronowa Elena Guro Maria Ender Simryn Gill Xenia Ender	2012		2012
	Atsuko Takana Liubov Popova		
2006	2013		2013
Destiny Deacon Mieko Shiomi Shadi Ghadirian Yayoi Kusama	2014		2014
	2015	2006	2015
	Destiny Deacon Virginia Fraser Nora Aslan	Shadi Ghadirian	Nora Aslan
2007	2016	2007	2016
Chen Ke Cui Xiuwen Xiang Jing Yin Xiuzhen	2017	Chen Ke Cui Xiuwen Xiang Jing Yin Xiuzhen	2017
	Leticia Parente Takako Saito Yayoi Kusama		Leticia Parente
2008	2018	2008	2018
	Yayoi Kusama		

Figure 4.

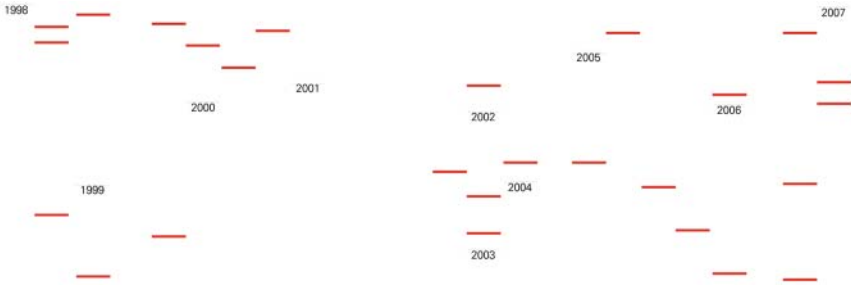


Figure 5.



Figure 6.

least in theory accepted in parliament?” This essay adds, Why shouldn’t the cultural institution include women of the Global South in its canon? I argue that this is our task, almost like a moral obligation, as Grada Kilomba (2005) expresses. This is a work we should do to remind ourselves “of the very many spaces where we are voiceless. Spaces we usually cannot enter, and which have to be, in terms of bell hooks, ‘interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary practice’” (Kilomba 2005: 22). An act of becoming again, the narrator of our own history and thus “the absolute opposition of what the colonial project has predetermined” (Kilomba 2005: 22). While we wait for other stories to be told, de(s)colonial analyses of data in the museological context are a first step in the conversation to increase the self-determination and agency of the communities that museums represent.



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Notes

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- 1 On September 15, 2001, the Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien was reopened in the Museumsquartier in the historic center of Vienna. Therefore, the exhibitions at the Palais Liechtenstein and the 20er Haus from 1998 to August 2001 were included in this analysis, as these institutions ran mumok's programming during this time.
- 2 Scholars that have also addressed the conformation of a national identity from the arts are Steyerl ([2006] 2011), Kastner (2007), Buchholz (2016), and Jurt (1998).

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