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# In conversation with Guy Brett

By Gulsen Bal

a piece of sky is missing!

Guy Brett is long established art critic and curator who lives and works in London. He has written extensively since the 1960s and has curated/organised a number of international exhibitions addressing the aesthetic constitution of the cultural specific condition within a rhetoric space along the axis of dialogical model of curating in exhibition-making beyond the boundaries of dichotomies in a multitude between global and local interests.

Gulsen Bal: How did you develop your interest in curating?

Guy Brett: Well let's see. When I was starting out in the 1960s the word curating didn't exist as a verb, only as a noun. It means a carer: someone who takes care of objects in a museum (also keeper, custodian), or in the ecclesiastical sense of the curate, someone entrusted with the care of souls. In those days curating was simply called organising an exhibition, and it went on of course. But I've begun and have continued as a writer on art, mainly. And I've always been very concerned about the visual presentation of things I've written. If it's been possible I've worked closely with the graphic designer on the choice and layout of pictures with the text, for articles in magazines, catalogue texts and books.

But I love organising exhibitions, and if the opportunity has come up I've taken it. The first show I did was commissioned by the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1966, a touring show of kinetic art. It included works by Takis, David Medalla, Soto, Lygia Clark, Tinguely, Pol Bury, von Graevenitz, Liliane Lijn and Gianni Colombo. This kind of art in movement excited me greatly and I was very close to Signals London, the showroom run by Paul Keeler and David Medalla in Wigmore Street in the mid-60s which attracted a very large and diverse public in those days for its exhibitions. We were all in our early 20s. David Medalla had arrived from the Philippines a few years before. He had a genuinely international outlook and the internationalism of kinetic art was one of the things that inspired us about it (it was also a tendency in poetry, by the way). The artists I just mentioned come from, respectively, Greece, the Philippines, Venezuela, Brazil, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, USA and Italy! Signals initiated the first large-scale shows in Europe to artists like Soto, Alejandro Otero, Sergio Camargo, Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica.

Bal: There was a discussion on the role shift of the curator especially in the late 90s, and I think it was Maria Lind who proposed the term performative curating to describe a kind of exhibition practice where performative curating, along the axis of dialogical model of curating, describes performativity in relation to the form of the exhibition itself. Yet it seems this exhibition-making methodology was not something new!

Brett: No I don't think it's new, but the phrase performative curating can give a clue to both the good side and the bad side of the current situation. Obviously organising an exhibition of a contemporary artist must involve a dialogue with him or her. And I think it's the quality of that dialogue which shines through the solo exhibitions we remember from the 60s, say the collaborations of Pontus Hulten with Niki de Saint-Phalle and Jean Tinguely, or Harald Szeeman with conceptual artists, or for that matter Medalla with the artists at Signals. He invited - and maybe challenged - each one to produce a large new work for the big downstairs wall in the gallery. The dialogue demands deep knowledge of the work and great sensitivity, but I agree there's a showmanship side to curating too. But if performative means simply ego-based showing off in front of an audience, based on a

shallow response to art work itself, then you have a contradiction in the very terms used â careless care!

Bal: The 90âs neo-institutional critique and re-politicised art practice shows us a variety of tendencies informing ânewâ artistic strategies. How would you describe the constituency of dialogic art practice in the scope of this passage? Perhaps we can take up here some of the issues that you have introduced in your essay, âThe Century of Kinesthesia,