

The International Association of Corporate Collections of Contemporary Art (IACCCA)
International Symposium 2016

Report: *The Art of Collecting and Collaboration*

On Friday 25th November 2016 I was privileged to be invited to the IACCCA International Symposium at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam by the chair of the committee and the curator of the Collection Pictet, Loa Haagen Pictet, who I had interviewed earlier this year. Loa Haagen Pictet introduced the symposium and explained the role of the IACCCA. The association was founded in 2007 by and for professional corporate curators from around the world as a platform to reflect, challenge and learn. It has grown to now include over 40 members internationally. Their mission statement is clear, 'IACCCA sets standards for corporate collections in management and organisation. It establishes guidelines for professional practice and achievements for corporate collections'. The network reflects on the future and the responsibilities of corporate collections aiming to foster, 'innovative practices in a constantly changing environment' (IACCCA mission statements).

The symposium marked the IACCCA's first decade and consisted of a programme with a diverse range of speakers who discussed the developments and potentialities for collaboration between art collections in the public and private sectors. Speakers included directors and curators from private collections, public institutions, galleries and foundations, as well as an art historian. Four corporate collections were represented. This widespread and varied programme was succinctly summed up as 'synergies and new perspectives on collaboration'.



Clearly, the two main focuses were collaboration and the act of collecting and their many forms. The etymology of collect is, 'saying something with' as Ioanna Vryzaki, the director of the D.Daskalopoulos Collection in Athens outlined. Their collection was an exemplar of such a way of thinking. Their collection consists of around 500 contemporary artworks by 220 leading international and Greek artists and she was clear that one of the main focuses of the collections is, 'the human body as a source of creativity and the vessel of existential, social and ideological struggle'. The collection was started by Dimitris Daskalopoulos, a Greek businessman and CEO of Vivartia, the largest food conglomerate in Greece, who has a passion

for art and collecting. A previous presentation by the director of the Whitechapel Gallery in London, Iwona Blazwick OBE, described a show that they had curated with select artworks from the D.Daskalopoulos Collection in 2010. The exhibition titled "Keeping it Real" took place in four 'acts' or sections questioning identity, desire and human vulnerability. Iwona Blazwick summed up the exhibition, 'the body as the arena and a response to the violence [occurring] today'. This was an intriguing example of a private collection with an open lending policy working with a gallery, who do not have a collection of its own at all. Thus, they rely on such loans to showcase exhibitions. What is also intriguing is that part of the D.Daskalopoulos collection was taken and exhibited in a new space with new curators and thus new ideas. This opened up new discourses and new audiences, which would not be possible within the original collection space. This act of separation and focus around select artworks opened up such exciting opportunities for both parties; international exposure for the collection and the artworks on the one side and new conversations and audiences on the other.

Another such example was an exhibition organised with the loan of artworks from the V-A-C Collection in Russia, founded by billionaire Leonid Mikhelson. This exhibition in 2014 was particularly experimental; as it was curated by the British artist Mike Nelson. He created a raised platform or one could call it a large shallow plinth for the exhibition, which looked like and acted like an artist's studio floor. On this platform, the artist chose sculptures from the collection, which were a mixture of works by celebrated twentieth century artists such as Constantin Brancusi and Alberto Giacometti and contemporary artists like Paweł Althamer. Althamer's work, which consisted of three figures around a campfire was the focal point of the arrangement. This approach was perhaps surprising as artworks, which are usually on separate plinths and in protective cases were now arranged in an experimental way around this camp fire on what appeared like an artist's studio floor. Bold curation opened up fresh readings of the artworks in a, 'a distinctive poetic juxtaposition of time and space'. Iwona Blazwick summed up by saying that through such means the collection was now a work of art. One could argue that this unique approach to display could not happen inside in Russia as it needed a new setting and new ideas. Whitechapel summed up their approach as, 'opening up rarely seen collections from around the world'. What these examples really show is the sheer amount of creative possibility that exists with collaboration, which are symbiotically mutually beneficial for everyone.

The executive director of De Nederlandsche Bank, Frank Elderson, described the artworks he saw on his every day walk into the bank through the building to his office and related them back to the corporation's ethos. The art collection started in 1982 and has 12,000 artworks. DNB sums up, 'DNB offers young and talented artists a stage for their current work. But also work by established (inter)national artists is shown' (DNB mission statement). One such artwork which typified DNB's philosophy was '*Un cóctel de competencias y talentos*' 1989 by Willem Oorebeek, which hung in his office, which means in English 'A cocktail of skills and talents' or as Elderson construed 'we are a cocktail of talents'. Elderson explained that for him this work related to the fact that individuals come to work for the bank from many different places but they work together and so they become greater than the sums of their parts, just like the individual artworks in the collection. Elderson was also honest when it came to the selling policy of the collection as their position could be argued to be quite unique as most corporate collections do not sell works and if they do it is often linked to rapid increases in value and insurance or charity sales. De Nederlandsche Bank sell artworks when they believe

that they have run their course, this means that the collection is ‘constantly being lived’ as they always reinvest in art again. This is most important. Elderson also had a very clear view on what art meant as for him art best summarises and captures the changes occurring in the world today and therefore it is most unique. Corporations who understand and adopt such ways of thinking showcase their dynamism by supporting, collecting and engaging with art. Elderson questioned, ‘who wants to work for a company who liquidates its art collection?’.



Sanne ten Brink, head curator of the ING Collection, was clear about the attitude of their collection, ‘the collection stands for change and innovation and helps foster culture within ING’. They work with young, experimental and emerging artists many in the early stages of their careers, such as just after art school which she saw as a tipping point. Many corporations organise competitions, for example Prix Pictet (Pictet & Cie Bank) and the Abraaj Group Art Prize. Each corporation and its collection have their own style and thus this is reflected in the entry criteria when it comes to such prizes, whether this be the medium of the artworks, nationality or age of the artist for instance. ING offers the UNSEEN Talent Award, which is an award for young photographers, with whom the ING team want to ‘empower’. The award provides a platform for emerging European photography talent to present their work on a global scale. Each of the finalists created an artwork for the ING Collection in response to this year’s theme: ‘Fool for Love’, which explores the passion and devotion required to pursue one’s dreams. The winner of the ING Unseen Talent Award 2016 was Thomas Albdorf from Austria, who received a €10,000 prize to fund a new project. The Public Prize winner, which was determined by an online poll, was Miren Pastor from Spain. She was awarded a commission to create new work for the ING Collection; another form of collaboration and positive symbiotic relationships.

Sanne ten Brink also explained some of the initiatives that she employs to bring staff closer to the artworks. An example is the ‘adopt an artwork’ scheme, whereby staff members if they so wish, follow an assigned artwork from the collection and its history. She also explained that the decision was taken to reduce their collection and its focus. They condensed the number of artworks from 25,000 to 10,000 through a series of donations to museums, such as the Rijksmuseum and the Drents Museum Assen, as well as educational, health care institutions and even Natura Artis Magistra, which is a zoo in Amsterdam. A substantial philanthropic act indeed.

Brink is also Chair of the Dutch Association of Corporate Art Collections (VBCN), which was founded in 2005. It is the premier platform in the Netherlands for a cooperation of companies, organisations and institutions, which in addition to their main activities collect art. Much like a country specific IACCCA, curators and art advisors of corporate art collections exchange expertise and work together around four core values at the heart of their collection policy to be 'dynamic', 'independent', 'international' and 'stimulative'. VBCN comprises of 50 organisations who hold corporate art collections who own a total of over 100,000 artworks. VBCN also enters into dialogue with representatives, be that museological, commercial or artist's circuits. They encourage loans to museums making dozens of exhibitions possible each year. The platform also promotes and initiates discussion and research into the cultural and social role of corporate art collections. They have funded the research project: 'Corporate collections as emerging heritage; Art market dynamics, corporate strategies, and public support for the arts' lead by Arnold Witte. He is the Associate Professor at the University of Amsterdam and Art Historian at the Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome. He presented some of his findings thus far and some key observations on the corporate art environment in Holland past and present. Firstly, he explored the broad term of a corporation; essentially companies and groups of people who are authorised to act as a single entity. Now corporations technically now include hospitals, educational institutions, governmental and semi-governmental bodies.

According to Witte's research, depending on their size, Dutch corporate collections spend anywhere between €10,000 and one million euros a year on acquisitions. Before 2008, Dutch corporations represented between 20% to 40% of the total turnover of the Dutch contemporary art market. It is not surprising that in 2008 many Dutch corporations stopped buying new works altogether. In 2009, the total turnover of the Dutch primary art market due to Dutch corporations dropped but still showed resilience at somewhere between 5% and 10% (this research was based on the VBCN members). Now, the situation seems to have returned to pre-2008 levels or is returning for many corporate collections.

Hendrik Driessen, Director of De Pont Museum in Tilburg, explained the origins, ethos and inner workings of the De Pont collection. This is not a corporate art collection but a foundation created in 1988 and funded by Jan de Pont, who was a very successful businessman and attorney. Jan de Pont devoted part his estate to contemporary art. The decision making and direction was entrusted solely to Hendrik Driessen, a former curator and museum director. The approach of the foundation is very much that what they buy is final; they will live with it forever and no artworks are ever sold. The decision was made that every artwork bought should lead to and relate to the next one. They collected in depth with a focus and thus adhered to a vertical approach to collecting rather than a broad encyclopedic approach (horizontal). The location or museum for the collection was an empty former wool spinning mill in the Dutch city of Tilburg with a space of over 7000 square meters. They built walls in the museum and started organising exhibitions with the works that they acquired. Driessen started collecting artists who he knew from his previous employment, such as Richard Serra, James Turrell and Richard Long. He saw the importance in studio visits and this is how he started collecting artists, such as Marlene Dumas. In fact, he showed her first major multiple work which consisted of 111 ink drawings of faces titled '*Black Drawings*' 1991-2. She is now an internationally successful artist who had a recent solo retrospective at the Tate Modern. Driessen also had a close relationship with the German painter Sigmar Polke and purchased

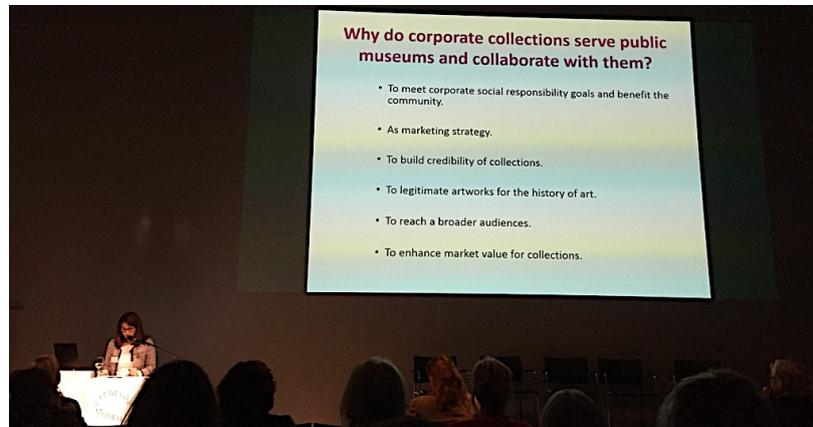
four very large paintings for the collection. The De Pont Museum still has only 9 employees and in September 2016 opened a new wing showing new media works. The foundation is still independent as it supports itself through endowments and its restaurant.



Two corporate collection members spoke about their wide arching collaborations. Grazia Quaroni, Director of Collections for the Fondation Cartier for Contemporary Art, spoke about the vast array of art initiatives Cartier has supported; 100 exhibitions and the commissioning of 800 artworks. She is now in charge of showing the collection around the world 'pushing' the collection far and beyond its offices or the exhibition space, constructed in 1994 and designed by the architect Jean Nouvel, in Paris. Fondation Cartier was created in 1984 and decided to organise a heavy and wide scoped series of loans moving between public and private institutions all over the world, for example in Brazil, Argentina and Seoul. Their ethos and aim is to assert, 'its bold [and] free-spirited approach to art' (Fondation Cartier manifesto). Such exhibitions have been held for renowned artists, such as William Eggleston, Ron Mueck and Bruce Nauman. Such an approach has helped Cartier become an internationally respected and trusted luxury brand whereas before such activities one could maintain that they were not trusted or supported anywhere near as much. Cartier have a clear plan as can be seen by their statement, 'exhibitions and the collection itself are frequently sent to institutions abroad, enhancing the Fondation Cartier's international profile...[Cartier] is recognised on the international artistic scene and hailed by the public, the Fondation Cartier distinguishes itself by its curiosity, originality and heterogeneity'.

A similar wide reaching collaborative approach was conveyed by the director and former chief curator of the La Caixa collection in Spain. Nimfa Bisbe explained that they heavily work with and support museums all over Spain through loans and exhibitions. She explained that many collections now assume tasks that had previously seemed exclusive to public museums. La Caixa Banking Foundation began organising exhibitions in the 1980s that presented the latest contemporary art and aimed to show how they were linked to works of the twentieth century. Now, the collection has over 900 artworks by major international artists, starting with works from the time (the original idea was to 'preserve the memory of the present') and then acquired works from the 1960s and 1970s to widen its historical reach. Their aim was to create, 'a collection that would fill the gap that existed at that time in Spain, where contemporary art had not yet found a place in museums and major collections'. The

collaborations with museums aim to promote, 'combinations and readings that offer fresh insights [as well as] bringing the collection to the public' (mission statements). The centre for this activity is the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA). They also work with museums in Madrid and Palma for example (see image below). Through regularly presenting selected artworks from the collection in relation to a topical theme or an intrinsic aspect of artistic practice the collection can be seen as a, 'living thing that reflects the spirit of our times'. Since its conception, the collection has featured in over one hundred exhibitions held in Spain as well as various countries in Europe and the Americas. Their mission statement powerfully summarises, 'when we talk about the La Caixa Collection of Contemporary Art we use the word *commitment*. Our commitment is to society'.



It is clear that there is a profusion of activity from the many facets of art collecting which opens up the opportunity for collaboration. Such collaboration offers numerous benefits for all parties involved; new and challenging discourses, different and larger audiences open up, experimental arenas, educational outreach, marketing and brand identity ventures as well as collection, artist and artwork exposure amongst others. What is noticeable is that there are more and more areas and openings for cross fertilisation and symbiotic relationships; whether this is one exhibition or a prolonged affiliation. An art collection can therefore become an evolving and living entity existing in many different places at the same time rather than in a single location. What is also evident is that many collections exist due to the success and passion of individuals. Each collection has a different approach depending on individual

tastes, concerns and ethos and this is especially true if one considers corporate collections. Here, the collection embodies the activities, values and culture of the corporation and through a programme of collaborations this is brought to a national or even global scale. Many see it as a public duty but will no doubt embrace the additional benefits that come with such synergies.

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