

More Than Just Hanging Pictures

Mehmet Dayi wants to bring art to port-a-potties – a conversation about the importance of curators for artists

Bring art to unusual places – that is the idea behind many of the projects realized by Mehmet Dayi. For example, he has organized the exhibition “Zimmer frei – room available” in Hotel Mariandl for the last twelve years as part of his job with the City of Munich’s Department for Culture. In 2011, working as an independent curator for the project “Art Homes,” he brought art into private flats in Munich and Istanbul. Currently, he is planning his next independent project: with “Nimm mich mit – take me along,” ten curators and ten artists will present their art in ten European cities – in motorhomes. The long journey is slated to begin in 2014, but as a prelude Dayi wants to implement an unusual idea this coming May (2013) in Munich: exhibit art in mobile port-a-potties.

SZ: Why art in port-a-potties?

Dayi: I try to create other unusual spaces for art. I also want to play a bit – have some fun with art. My projects are about bringing art to places where people are. These toilets have always interested me somehow – although I’ve never been in one. They are bizarre objects that have become part of our environment.

What then does an artist get from such exhibiting spaces?

Artists have to process new ideas quickly, react to moments spontaneously. It’s about reactions towards the space and events.



ILLUSTRATION: NINA ANNABELLA MÄRKL

The port-a-potty project is a prelude to the big motorhome project “Nimm mich mit – take me along”. There, it’s not the artists that are front and center, but rather the curators.

The motorhome project is a very large, involved project, with an emphasis on up and coming curators. They should be promoted just as much as the artists. The port-a-potty show serves also as preparation for my team, which will be working on the motorhome project. My staff needs to first experience for themselves how a curator works.

Which prerequisites do curators, who want to present contemporary art, need to possess?

They should be capable of coming up with their own ideas – without this, the act of curating is too bland. It’s not just about hanging up pictures and taking them back down again, but rather, developing creative projects that give artists room to work in. Curators have to be able to offer artists possibilities, to open new avenues for contemporary art. They should prod and provoke them, set them in motion.

Curator promotion is therefore indirect artist promotion?

Yes, because curators are the ones spurring artists forward. It’s problematic when they stand in the artists’ way. We have masses of artists coming out of the academies, without any sense of direction. We need people to take them under their wing at the beginning, so that they have a chance to develop in an open creative space. Otherwise, they orient themselves towards that which promises success, let themselves be ruled by the market – when they are the ones who should be ruling. That’s why we need curators who don’t play along with purely market driven trends. Otherwise, artistic development is hindered.

Apart from only a few postgraduate programs, up till now there aren’t many opportunities to study to become a curator beyond the usual studies in art history. Things are starting to develop, maybe in ten years we’ll see more. But one also learns through hands-on practice.

How did you become a curator?

I ended up in the Department for Culture by accident, but I was also in the independent art scene in Istanbul for a year in 1977. It came naturally to me. I have fun finding gaps that have been overlooked by colleagues and developing creative projects which are not to everyone’s taste.

Does an artist really need a curator? Doesn’t he himself know better, how his works should be presented?

Just for presenting, he really doesn’t need one. That’s why I say: curators have to develop their own artistic ideas, take a position, otherwise they really aren’t necessary. Their function can be compared with that of a conductor or director: they are artists themselves but they need other artists to implement their ideas.

INTERVIEW: JUDITH LIERE

TRANSLATION: BENJY BERNHART



Mehmet Dayi, independent curator and Munich Department for Culture staff member, presents upcoming artists’ work in unconventional spaces beyond galleries and museums through his unusual projects.