

## Q&A with Centre Pompidou's NYC-based Curator

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For the first time, the Centre Pompidou Foundation decided to appoint a New York-based curator to keep Paris informed of contemporary art trends in the city. This philanthropic arm of the museum hired Sylvia Chivaranond for the exciting new role as the first Suzanne Deal Booth Adjunct Curator of American Art, based on her stellar reputation as a curator for institutions such as the Walker Art Center, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, Tate Gallery in London and the 2003 Venice Biennale.

Just as Ms. Chivaranond begins her new post of working closely with members of the Centre Pompidou Foundation and the Centre Pompidou in Paris to develop their expanding programs of acquiring and seeking donations of American art, we had the chance to ask her a few questions. Read our interview with Sylvia Chivaranond below, where we discuss the art market bubble, the art fair overload, advice for artists seeking recognition and much more.



### **What does your day-to-day look like with this new post? Which challenges do you anticipate? Perks?**

The day-to-day involves being in contact with the Pompidou curators regarding current exhibitions, programs, etc. in NYC and elsewhere; researching artists of interest to the Pompidou; working on a plan to identify which artists they would like to collect more in-depth and what is absent in terms of historical gaps in the collection; researching emerging artists and gallery/museum shows both here and abroad; the latest news on any studio visits. I am also in constant dialogue with the Foundation's Board Members in terms of any gifts to consider for the Museum. The challenge is how to buy important art for the Museum on a limited budget.

The perks of this job include being in close contact with the remarkable group of Pompidou curators from various departments ranging from drawing, architecture, design, photography painting and sculpture; having access to the vast permanent collection and archive; traveling to see exhibitions and artists of interest; working closely with the Foundation's Board and members in order to support the mission.

**How will you predict up-and-coming talent? What advice would you give to emerging artists who are trying to get noticed?**

I don't predict as much as I tend to follow very carefully artists of interest; track their progress by frequenting their studios and shows. And eventually take calculated risks on exhibiting and purchasing works by emerging artists. Conversing with patrons of art as well as curatorial colleagues from around the world about the current state of art/artists remains crucial. I'm constantly looking and reading about art on a daily basis.

My advice to emerging artists is always the same: work, work, work and have a dialogue with as many people as possible about your work and the work you find of interest. Also, experience as much art as possible. The practice of seeing/ experiencing as much art as possible is crucial; it refines one's vision and hones it down. Even though my current position at the Centre Pompidou Foundation calls for a focus on American art, I look at work made by artists from around the world.

**As the demand for blue-chip art outstrips supply, we witnessed a record-breaking year for post-war and contemporary art auctions. In your opinion, will the contemporary art market bubble burst?**

I think the contemporary art market goes through highs and lows. What we are experiencing now is the demand for works of art by artists whose supply has dwindled. Personally, I love re-discovering and championing artists who have long been forgotten or bypassed by art history. Eventually, even those artists' prices catch up with the driving force of the economy. The challenge is how do museums collect intelligently and timely, just a bit ahead of the curve and just enough to take calculated risks. This is why one of my roles together with the Pompidou curators is to take as a guiding force the exhibition program – present and future – as a determining strategy to begin to collect in a more efficient manner.

**Some spoke about an art fair overload this year. Which events will you keep on your calendar during your first year in this position and why?**

Even though we moan about the surplus of fairs, I think they are important tools to use vis-à-vis the programs of international galleries, and they enable curators to take the current temperature of contemporary art. It is up to us to do the follow up when searching out the most interesting artists and exhibitions. For example, in this month's Art Basel Miami Beach I thoroughly enjoyed, among other things the Art Positions section, where I found several interesting galleries and artists from Bogota, a part of the world that I would love to further explore.

**Members of the Georges Pompidou Art and Culture Foundation pay \$20,000 in annual dues to buy American artworks, is that true? How does the acquisition process work, and how do you balance the wishes of donors with the mission of a government-owned national museum?**

Yes, the annual dues to join the Foundation begin at \$20,000. Since 1977 with its founder Dominique de Menil the Foundation has supported the acquisitions and gifts over 300 works to the Museum. The mission of the Foundation and the Museum is the same: to collect, preserve and promote the best modern and contemporary art. The Foundation plays a pivotal role and by hiring me I can best utilize my skills and experience to assess, along with the Pompidou's curators, the priorities for the collection. The Foundation meets bi-annually to formalize the acquisitions and acceptance of gifts.

In order to become a member of the Foundation not only does one have to be vested in contemporary art but also they clearly support the mission of the Museum. One example is Suzanne Deal Booth, the Board Director who funds my position. This synergy among the collectors and the Museum makes our relationship special, nurturing an environment with shared interests. That said, as a government-owned national museum the Pompidou is not allowed to have a de-accession policy; everything that is accessioned into the Museum will never leave.

**Please tell us your opinion about the contemporary art scene in Paris versus the scene in NYC. What do you hope to introduce or promote to the team of curators in Paris?**



The contemporary art scene in Paris is very dynamic. There are always exciting visual art, dance and performance programs at the Centre Pompidou, the Musée d'Art Modern de la Ville de Paris, Palais de Tokyo as well as smaller institutions like La Maison Rouge, Kadist Foundation, and Le Plateau. The City of Paris supports French artists or artists who have lived in Paris for a number of years by providing them with artist studios and stipends. The Parisian scene continues to flourish as proof that the galleries are promoting exciting artists as well.

The NYC scene is very fluid and moves at a much faster pace, which is why the Pompidou curators prefer to have someone on the ground here so that I may relay the information to them quickly. The number of gallery shows that turnover every six weeks is overwhelming compared to the number in Paris. There are several new artist-run gallery spaces popping up in Red Hook and the outskirts of NYC. There are now four art fairs in NYC alone: The Independent, The Armory, the ADAA and Frieze. Museum expansions are happening all over the city as we speak.

I hope to share my knowledge of the scene in NYC with my curatorial colleagues in Paris in order to promote the mission of the Foundation and the Museum. I want them to know what I experience in NYC and in other American cities through an ongoing dialogue about exhibitions, performances, dance, and music programs. I want them to know about any and all exciting new initiatives in the arts as well as any pertinent discussions about the nature of collecting and exhibiting contemporary art, just as they share their knowledge with me. I hope I am able to provide the context in which to view American art within the vast collection of the Centre Pompidou.

*Interviewed by MutualArt's Christine Bednarz*