

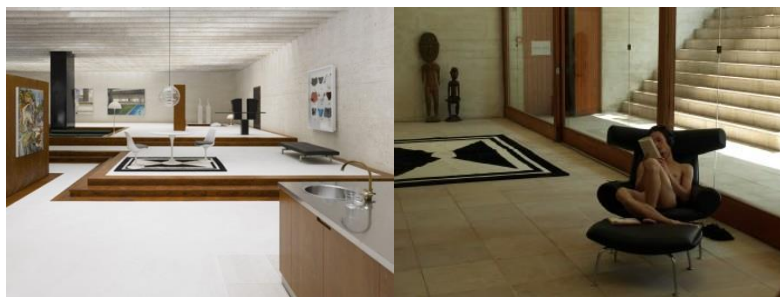
Peter Macapia

Art, Design, and Politics: A Roundtable

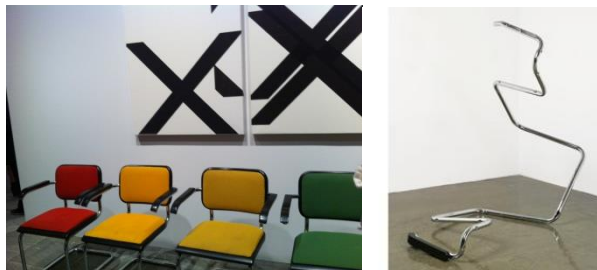
There is a question about how the articulation of the political might be distinguished between art and design, and especially in the context of the global fairs, the market, and the general economy of art. Or rather, how art and design articulate that distinction. I invited a group of artists, gallerists, critics and designers to participate in a discussion that was organized and curated toward their areas of expertise. I posed a number of questions below. Vito Acconci, Artist and Architectural designer ; Karen Archey, Curator and Critic; Franklin Boyd, Founder Boyd Level; Alexandra Cunningham, Director of Exhibitions Design Miami/Basel; Cristina Grajales, Curator and Gallerist (Cristina Grajales Gallery); Alice Higgins, Associate Director at Friedman Benda ; Stephen Javaras, collector; Kibum Kim, Lawyer and Writer co-founder of Newd; Peter Macapia, Artist and Architectural Designer (moderator); Zesty Meyers, Artist, Author, Curator, Gallerist (r20th Gallery); Jen Renzi, Writer and Editor; Laetitia Wolff, Founder, futureflair and Executive Director, designNYC

*With special thanks to Franklin Boyd for hosting this event. Danica Selem, Zach Gzrysbowski, and Maria Nikolavski. Photos copyright Macapia/Nikolavski.

1) Elmgreen and Dragset's *The Collectors* (Venice Biennale, 2009) arrives as a perfect kind of project in which, art, design, interior design, performance, and so on had found an incredible marriage (though not long after Elmgreen and Dragset split up) – and yet it is art, not design. Can we draw strict divisions in a project like this? (Javaras, Renzi, Grajales, Archey, Cunningham, Boyd)



2) Wade Guyton's recent project at the Whitney included a rainbow assortment of Breur office chairs, and then around the corner an unraveled Breur chair posing as sculpture, much like turning the corner from Duchamp to Picasso – or Picasso/Julio Gonzalez/Kline. The gesture is clearly about design, about modernism. But what does the unraveling of the chair indicate? What is the cultural logic of this gesture at the intersection of art and design? (Abdalla, Cunningham, Higgins, Meyers, Archey, Kim)



3) The continued drift of fabrication technology into sculptural form has had an irreversible destiny with regard to furniture. But it has also become a spectacle in its own right. From Gramazio and Kohler's para-military wall construction system with flying robots to raAndom International's viewer-interactive installations, technology seems to inspire a kind of relentless ecstasy. But the novelty of technology poses a question about spectacle and distraction, especially for design: in a sense, as one philosopher put it, technology is social before it is technological. What are the cultural stakes in the continued insistence on technology-as-novelty? And if not, how do designers and artists employ technology in ways that can also be culturally critical and contemplative? (Cunningham, Wolff, Archey)



4) On the low-tech side, the evolution of collaboratives such as Slavs and Tatars introduce a complex range of cultural investigations and forms of production that touch upon language, identity politics, craft, nationalism, institutional critique, and so on. One might call it the continued politics of making and saying introduced in the 60s and 70s by such artists as Alighiero Boetti. Who are designers or which design collaboratives do you feel also have this potential? (Yuzna, Abdalla, Meyers, Cunningham)

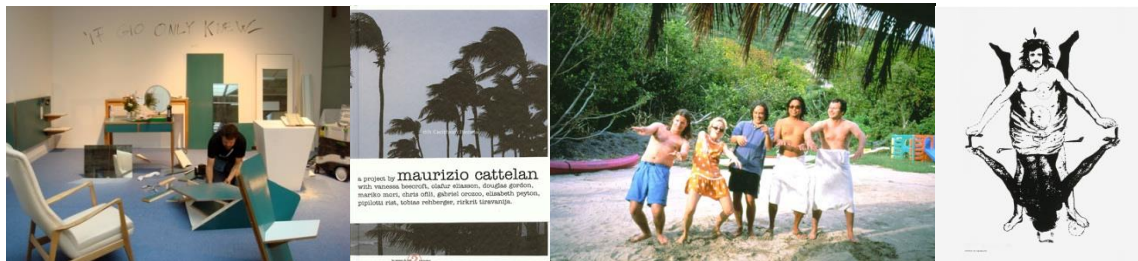


5) "the artwork really looks ridiculous behind that dazzling chandelier, doesn't it?" As remarked in Huffington Post's review of Cristina Grajales's exhibition including Sebastian's Errazuriz's *Occupy Chairs*, the question is whether this project sustains more than irony or sophomoric cynicism? One might say that the work *elicits* a social and political commentary. But whether it's an *engaged* critique is an important question. What potential do you see for exhibition (even the art fair) to introduce a theme as criticality as engaged as, say, Glen Ligon's "I Am a Man" painting (1988)¹ or Guy Ben Ner's Ikea Sitcom?. (Higgins, Yuzna, Javaras, Grajales, Boyd, Kim)

¹ Ligon's painting is based on the civil rights demonstration by Memphis sanitation workers in 1968.



10) Alighiero Boetti's exhibition announcement Shaman/Showman, Cattelan's Sixth Caribbean Biennial frame the production of art and culture as both a counterfeit and somehow strangely sincere (one thinks also of Bruce Nauman's "The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths") -- when I compare these to, say, Martino Gamper's refabrication of Gio Ponti's pieces, I wonder if the notion of publicity – as itself an artwork -- is still something viable for the design world, or whether it just catches our consciousness in a temporary but non-binding way. (Abdalla, Wolff, Grajales, Kim)



11) Finally, the massive growth of the market for contemporary art and contemporary design insist among other things on the durability of quality. What does this mean to you? And in what way do you see the growth and transformation of curatorial practices, political practices, and so on relative to the changes in collecting, exhibiting, and selling? In other words, the "market" is obviously an important venue of exhibition and value, but what are the risks we can take in this environment, and are we keeping the environment too safe because it's commercial? (Everyone)

12) Additional: I had originally written this as a question for Meyers and Grajales but I think I'll open it to anyone.

In a recent trip to Paris, I began to realize that the curators I was meeting were much more interesting than the artists (the artists were of course good artists, but the curators were just maybe a bit more experimental. One of them, many years ago, had created an artist in residency and exhibition/installation program at a women's clinic in Grenoble – historically it was the first clinic to practice abortion legally in France. His summation of the experience, quite intense obviously, is that you are on the thinnest line between the private and the public. And this was a real challenge. And of course it was in many ways very depressing. It wasn't meant to be a political exhibition. But that might have been its solemn brilliance. Maybe that it was more of a story about art that you could never really find in another space, another institution. Is it possible for design to produce this reflection and not be art or about art?



