

# The Future of the Museum

## 28 Dialogues

András Szántó

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**HATJE  
CANTZ**

*For my sons, Alexander and Hugo*

**HATJE  
CANTZ**

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## Introduction

# **AMBITION & ANXIETY: REIMAGINING THE ART MUSEUM**

This book is a product of the great pandemic lockdown of 2020, yet it points to a horizon far beyond. I had long planned a collection of conversations with museum directors, but I could not find the hook—or the time. Now, in the midst of a once-in-a-century calamity, here we all were, with plenty of time on our hands, staring down a future as new as it was uncertain.

It was clear by April 2020 that this year would go down in history as the biggest global pivot since the end of the Cold War, in 1989—not just for museums, but for all of us. One chapter was closing, another one was opening. Museums worldwide had shut their doors. Their essential way of operating and generating income—showing objects to people in live settings—was put on extended hold. It seemed a natural moment to wonder: What will the museum of the future be like? Whom will it serve? What forms will it take? What needs will it meet, and how?

It has been widely remarked that major crises tend to accelerate changes previously underway. So it has been for



art museums at this unprecedented moment. Even before Covid-19, the international museum field was in a period of protracted self-examination, mostly behind the scenes. New approaches to exhibition-making and museum management were being tested. Fledgling institutions were offering tantalizing solutions to the challenge of what a museum can be. And regardless of size or location, art institutions were questioning the role they were playing in societies where inequality is spiking, social justice is elusive, politics are polarized, and environmental breakdown is becoming a fact of life. These trends were already stirring intense debate about the functions and entanglements of today's art museums. A consensus was crystallizing that institutions need to be brought into a new alignment with a rapidly changing society. But the upheavals of 2020 intensified the reckoning, confronting museums with fundamental questions about their relevance and viability.

That sense of urgency—and opportunity—echoes through the dialogues in this book, all recorded and edited in the spring and summer of 2020, when three seismic shocks convulsed the museum world: the coronavirus epidemic, the ensuing meltdown in museum finances, and, especially in the United States, a confrontation with the historical legacies of racial injustice and structural inequity. Each of them would leave a lasting mark on the museum's future.

### **Shifting Landscape**

In September 2019, a few months before the city of Wuhan, China, diagnosed the first case of the novel coronavirus, the International Council of Museums, commonly known as ICOM, convened in Kyoto, Japan, to debate an updated definition of “the museum.” The proposal had been formulated through painstaking and time-consuming committee work. Verbose, clunky, and intensely disputed as it was, it epitomized a new attitude gaining currency in the

field, especially in emerging economies. It portrayed the art museum as much more than a storehouse of beauty and treasure, placing a marked emphasis on serving the needs of society at large. The Kyoto version—which is still being reviewed as this book goes to press—ran as follows:

*Museums are democratizing, inclusive, and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artifacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations, and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary well-being.*

ICOM's arduous effort to redefine the museum was an expression of a disruptive but ultimately constructive tension coursing through the art-museum field today. Institutions are grappling with how to balance their multiple mandates, old and new. Museums have been striving recently to broaden their impact, in particular by engaging younger generations and meeting the needs of marginalized groups. The contrast between the art museum's traditional functions—to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit—and its expanded role as an agent of community life and social progress has intensified in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, yet it was already felt well before. This tension forms a backdrop to this book, suggesting a mix of ambition and anxiety that pervades museums as they press forward into the twenty-first century.

Bringing together a diverse group of museum leaders from around the world, this collection of dialogues offers a panorama of the current mood and mindset in the museum sector. Together, these directors are responsible for some four dozen institutions and affiliates in fourteen countries on six continents, with a combined annual budget of approximately 900 million dollars, total annual in-person pre-Covid-19 visitation of more than thirty-six million people, and collections totaling well over seven million objects. The oldest institution represented here is 460 years old, five of them are less than five years old, and two of them haven't even officially opened yet. (Technically, two of the twenty-eight leaders are not running a museum presently—one recently stepped down from a directorial post to focus on digital projects; the other oversees an outdoor “museum without a ceiling,” as she described it.) The conversations testify to how art institutions and their leaders are feeling their way toward a future that will demand flexibility and resilience.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of that future is its global range. Museums—products of the European Enlightenment that until recently were concentrated in the world's more prosperous regions—have proliferated geographically in the last few decades. Some of the most exciting, paradigm-smashing experimentation now happens in Africa, Latin America, Australia, and parts of Asia. These are the places where the next chapters of the museum's story are being written. Recently formed institutions, as often as not brought to life by private initiatives, are figuring out ingenious ways to support local cultural practices, engage audiences that have not experienced a museum before, and disentangle their art histories from Western cultural narratives. Where museums in emerging regions once mimicked institutional models emanating from Berlin, London, and New York, they are now incubating dynamic

offshoots that are at once authentic and less beholden to convention.

Another facet of change has to do with the demographics of museum leadership, which are expected to shift in years to come, opening the door to yet more adaptation in museums' activities and attitudes. The wave of global unrest that followed the killing of George Floyd—as interviews for this book began—has created a heightened awareness of social inequity and insensitivity in museums. As several directors in these pages unequivocally note, tremendous work remains to be done to diversify museums—their executives, curators, trustees, staffs, donors, audiences, not to mention their collections. When it comes to the gender gap in museum leadership, institutions may be trending in the right direction, though by no means achieving parity as yet: it is a hopeful sign that half of the museum leaders in this volume are women.

Young museum leaders are also injecting new energy and a fresh point of view, and there are several in this book—two directors were thirty-three years old at the time of our conversation; one was twenty-one when she started her first museum. Youth tends to correlate with healthy skepticism about received wisdom and, these days, with a digital native's fluency with new technology. But regardless of their years, all the museum leaders in this compendium were invited for their probing outlook on art and its institutions, and for their openness to airing out their views in public.

Speaking of technology, this may be the first book on museums created on Zoom—with the interviews transpiring between the end of May and the middle of August 2020. Each chapter started out as an extended video conversation. Some questions recur in almost every dialogue; others are highly specific. Each exchange has a unique theme that plumbs a particular facet of the museum. These dialogues are not simply transcripts. They are the fruits of editorial collaborations. I adapted each original

conversation to a standard length, smoothing it out for clarity and flow. The participants reviewed and updated their texts. After several rounds, the dialogues went through a copyedit to assume their current form.

Inevitably, this book is a reflection of a particular moment—but crucially, it is not *about* that moment. The goal was to investigate the future at a time when we were all sitting still. The directors were speaking under circumstances of duress, when many of their institutions were still closed to the public, or had only recently opened after extended shutdowns, and even then with severe limitations. While the conversations do shed light on how art museums navigated through the Covid-19 crisis, what they are really about is what comes next. Freeing them from constant travel, the “great pause” provided time and space for my interlocutors to step back and think about the larger purposes of their institutions and their professional lives. Stuck in my own house and garden, though in a setting less picturesque than the leafy hills around Florence, I was often reminded of Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, the masterpiece of pandemic-inspired storytelling born of the 1348 plague—with forced seclusion becoming an occasion for collective reflection.

### **Work in Progress**

So what kind of art museum emerges from these pages? An institution in continuous need of reimagining.

By early 2020, the warning lights were blinking red. The pandemic laid bare the fragility of the museum’s business model. Revenues from tickets, shops, restaurants, and rentals evaporated. Staff were sent home, furloughed, and laid off in waves. Large traveling shows, a mainstay of museum programming, were no longer feasible. While museums demonstrated laudable dexterity in pivoting to remote work and free online programming, none of those

measures offset the cratering of their finances. The bleakest industry forecasts augured the permanent closure of thousands of institutions.

Then, on May 25, 2020, George Floyd died under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer. By early June, the largest civil-rights demonstrations in history were roiling American cities. Confederate monuments were toppled. Protests spread around the globe. Cultural institutions faced a new reckoning over their witting or unwitting complicity in the colonial plunder of cultural artifacts and their perpetuation of systemic racial injustice. The new scrutiny revived and intensified long-standing criticism about museum ethics. Notably, long before Covid-19, activists and the press were castigating art institutions for accepting financing from industries and individuals deemed morally questionable. To meaningfully address these compounding challenges would require daunting steps. Just a single example: one director in this book did the math concerning what it would take to establish gender parity in her museum's collection, and found that at the current pace of acquisitions, seventy-two years of buying only works by women artists would be required. For some institutions, it would undoubtedly take longer.

In short, the pandemic exposed both operational and reputational vulnerabilities in art museums. Despite their growing visitation, erstwhile efforts to engage new audiences, and elegant rhetoric about lowering barriers, art museums—more than science and natural-history museums, not to mention libraries—have remained, in the eyes of too many, a privileged and inscrutable domain. The verdict of governments was clear. Museums were not deemed “essential” institutions in the pandemic. My state of New York ranked them in the fourth reopening category, behind hardware stores and barber shops. Public decision-makers, especially in the US, did not see museums as playing an indispensable role in the lives of their communities.

Now the good news. The dialogues in this book offer abundant reassurance that innovation is alive and well in today's art museums. Their leaders understand that reforms and a willingness to try out new ideas will be required to affirm the museum's vibrancy, credibility, and financial sustainability—and they are doing something about it.

Innovation is alive and well in Beijing, where the dedicated entrepreneurial arm of the UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, UCCA Labs, is entering into collaborations with leading brands, mobilizing museum expertise to generate resources for its cultural mission. It is alive in Melbourne, where the Australian Centre for the Moving Image has a laboratory in which designers and artists can test out video games and virtual- and augmented-reality projects with the museum audience. A spirit of new thinking is motivating the Garage Museum, in Moscow, to look to Pixar Animation Studios for how to optimize a workspace for creativity; and the Toledo Museum of Art, in Ohio, to gain insights from Netflix about securing audience loyalty with serialized content.

New thinking about audience engagement is driving the National Gallery Singapore to organize a Children's Biennale, in part to get parents and grandparents to look at contemporary art. A taste for experimentation has led the Fondation Zinsou, in Benin, West Africa, to enlist the country's leading pop singers to sing songs about exhibitions that are broadcast on national radio, and likewise MACAAL, in Marrakesh, to invite people who have never been to the museum for Friday Couscous and Art conversation sessions. Curation and the visitor experience are getting a fresh look, too, from MASP, in São Paulo, where annual survey exhibitions about the histories of topics like childhood and ecology sidestep established art-historical categories; to the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, in Cape Town, where an entire functioning artist's studio was

moved into the museum to build appreciation and understanding of the creative process.

A sense of responsibility for community vibrancy lies behind the Pérez Art Museum Miami's Art Detectives series, in which kids from underserved communities look at art together with policemen to understand why they might be seeing it differently. That same out-of-the-box thinking has paved the way for a collaboration between the Brooklyn Museum of Art and the Center for Court Innovation, which allows young people who have committed minor infractions to take classes in the museum to clear their criminal records. A new way of looking at the museum as an organization is reflected in the future Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, in Los Angeles, where strategy and human resources will be framed, as its director put it, "through the lenses of diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and the sense of belonging."

A spirit of ingenuity and social commitment can be detected in many established institutions. The Serpentine Galleries, in London, have invited thousands of artists to create works as part of a global campaign to mobilize action against climate change. The Dresden State Art Collections experimented with setting up a co-directorship in Ghana to share decision-making and resources. In New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art is planning a period room dedicated to reflecting the complexity of the present moment. And at the other end of the spectrum, innovation and enterprise can be discovered in a brand-new museum set inside a botanical garden in Lomé, the capital of Togo, where education about biodiversity goes hand-in-hand with learning about culture, where beekeeping is part of the agenda, and where traditional Togolese storytellers sing and dance in front of the artworks to help connect them to local visitors.

The list goes on. Every single institution in this volume is experimenting with new approaches to curation, audience



engagement, technology, equity and inclusion, learning, and multisensory storytelling—all in the service of expanding the cultural remit and societal impact of the art museum.

Crafting this kind of responsive, empathetic, public-facing museum is a generational enterprise. The museum leaders in this book, born between 1960 and 1986 and averaging forty-nine years of age, are members of the cohort that is shaping museums today and for the years to come. They have in common certain professional experiences and cultural touchstones. They came of age in a postmodern, multidisciplinary art world, with a taste for artistic pluralism. Their careers unfolded in the large after the Cold War, in a relatively peaceful, prosperous time of globalism and affordable travel. Quite a few were inspired in their youth by the Centre Pompidou, in Paris, which modeled a radically new concept of the art museum under Pontus Hultén. Members of this generation steered museums through the flowering of biennial culture, the explosive growth of the art market, the mushrooming of art fairs, the gentrification of large cities, the dawning environmental crisis, recrudescent populism and authoritarianism, and of course, the upending of all dimensions of life by digital technologies.

It stands to reason that this generation's perspective on museums is different from those that came before. As one reads through the dialogues, a distinctive and more or less unifying philosophy emerges about what an art museum is and what it should aspire to be.

The outlook of my conversation partners is revealed in their answers to a question that came up in almost every discussion: *What is a "museum"*? While all underscored the public mission of museums, the centrality of their buildings and collections, and the meaningful encounters with objects and opportunities for learning that museums offer as places of "culture and education," they also repeatedly emphasized the museum's role as a "meeting place," an "agora" for "a certain kind of communal experience"—a

“sanctuary for idealism” and a “place of conversation” where “opinions are given voice” and where art can be a “catalyst” for “raising awareness, promoting critical thinking, and empowering communities.” Museums, as “reality producers,” can “point the way forward for our societies” and facilitate people’s “creative engagement in their own futures,” they noted. Particularly in countries where civic institutions are weak, the museum can be “a place where you are free to be right,” a “free zone,” a safe and welcoming “home”—not just for art and artists, but “in the sense of hospitality, of sharing, of communion.”

Members of this group place value not only on an institution’s academic acumen, but equally on its intangible traits, envisioning the museum as “a place of equilibrium” that is “not sterile” but “inclusive and empathetic”—a “living and experimental” entity, a “platform” that “would not be talking down to you” and “be more like a close friend.” Perhaps most important, members of this cohort see the museum as an open-ended undertaking that obeys no single model—“*museums instead of museum.*”

No less illuminating were the responses to the question: *What should museums unlearn to stay relevant?* My interlocutors did not mince words. Museums “need to let go of this obnoxious idea that they are an authority on all things,” to “get off of our own pedestals” and “break our own rules”—to shed “all the protocols” and “stop being so high-minded.” For many in this generation, museums have become “too institutional” and “too cautious.” The museum leaders decry institutions for “having a hard time speaking to the issues we say we want to speak to.” They implore them to “unlearn the orthodoxies of the Western intellectual tradition,” to “open up, gradually” and “start to listen more,” to “look and feel different,” so they can be more “artist-led and audience-focused.” Museums, in sum, should “let go of their arrogance” and get rid of “the perception of elitism.” To get there may mean going “beyond the idea

that everything happens in architectural structures and behind walls, in ever-growing buildings, with ever-bigger staff.”

### **Open Possibilities**

What I hope resonates above all from these dialogues is a signal about the onset of a next stage in the evolution of art museums worldwide. In this new chapter, not only will the art institution succeed in telling multiple histories and narratives about art, society, and individual lives, but the story of the museum itself will turn more kaleidoscopic—jettisoning its uniformity and splintering into an array of locally and culturally rooted versions of what a museum can be.

No longer perceived as an inheritance or imposition from the West, the museum of the future will have latitude to assume authentically regional forms and functions. In these diverse and hopefully surprising future incarnations, the art museum will be embraced by people of all backgrounds, ages, and occupations, welcoming and reflecting the full diversity of contemporary societies, seamlessly woven into the texture of the local community, while maintaining an active dialogue with the surrounding world. If the late twentieth century ushered in a liberating pluralism in art and cultural expression, it can only be hoped that the twenty-first century will do the same for the institutions of art. This sense of open possibility would be the ultimate guarantor of the enduring strength and relevance of the museum form.

These ideals draw on a history. In 1851, as preparations began for what would eventually become the Victoria & Albert Museum, in London, the German architect and social reformer Gottfried Semper (1803-1879), designer of the Dresden opera house and friend of Prince Albert, proposed that collections and public museums “are the true teachers

of a free people.” A century later, in 1944, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the inaugural director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, wrote, “The primary purpose of the Museum is to help people enjoy, understand, and use the visual arts of our time.” Around the same time, in 1947, the radical museum director and theoretician Alexander Dörner (1893–1957), among the German intellectuals who fled Nazi Europe for the United States, insisted that “the new type of art institute cannot merely be an art museum as it has been until now, but no museum at all. The new type will be more like a power station, a producer of new energy.” In 1967, as prosperity was spreading in postwar Western Europe, Johannes Cladders (1924–2009), the free-thinking curator, museum director, and confidant of Joseph Beuys, envisioned that “the concept of ‘anti’ in *anti-museum* should be understood as the demolition of the physical walls and the building up of a spiritual house.”

Writing some thirty years later, in 1999, the American museum administrator and legal expert Stephen E. Weil (1928–2005) admonished museums to look outward and not inward. In his influential essay “From Being About Something to Being for Somebody: the Ongoing Transformation of the American Art Museum,” he wrote: “In the emerging museum, responsiveness to the community must be understood not as a surrender, but, quite literally, as a fulfillment.” In the early years of the twenty-first century, the French-Caribbean cultural theorist Édouard Glissant (1928–2011) imagined the museum as an “archipelago,” resisting the homogenizing pull of modernity, responsive to cultural context, capable of embracing new spaces and temporalities in what he called *mondialité*—a posture of worldliness that sees difference not as a weakness to be exploited, but as a bonding agent to be applied to bring people and cultures together. And it seems it was only yesterday, in 2017, that Okwui Enwezor (1963–2019), the Nigerian-born poet, art historian, and museum

director who opened a generation's minds to the urgency of casting off colonial legacies and embracing global perspectives, forewarned that "we cannot take for granted that museums remain very important sites of judgment; the power of the Western idea of beauty and of aesthetic accomplishment has already been written."

This book adds more voices to a conversation stretching over the decades about the possibilities of art museums, both achieved and as-yet-uncharted. The notion of a more open and democratic museum—one that is more satisfying and engaged, more community-minded and welcoming, more participatory and inclusive, more pluralistic and diverse, more porous and polyphonic—is not entirely new. It has evolved by degree, taking inspiration from earlier precedents, and it is already animating the activities of progressive institutions and the people who work in them around the globe. Still, our unusual predicament has given it an accelerating boost. If the tribulations of the year 2020 have created any forward movement in art museums, it is by catalyzing new institutional models and behaviors that can meet the needs of the twenty-first century, so future generations can advance them even further.

## Location

SUHANYA RAFFEL  
Executive Director, M+ Museum  
Hong Kong, China

# **OBJECTS ARE FULL OF OPINIONS**

The future history of the art museum will to a significant degree be written in Asia. Few institutions will be more pivotal to that story than the M+ Museum, a brand-new center for visual culture opening in 2021 in Hong Kong's West Kowloon Cultural District, in a towering edifice designed by the Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron. The preparations are being led by Sri Lanka-born Suhanya Raffel, who took the helm of M+ after serving in curatorial and management roles at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, and the Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art

(QAGOMA), Brisbane, Australia, where she helped to establish the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art. Since 2016, Raffel has assembled a large and diverse international team to steward M+ Museum's growing collection, which is anchored by 1,500 works of Chinese contemporary art donated by Swiss businessman, diplomat, and art collector Uli Sigg. We spoke in June 2020, as Hong Kong was emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic and a sustained period of political strife.







Aerial view of Hong Kong with the M+ Museum building. Image courtesy of West Kowloon Cultural District Authority.

ANDRÁS SZÁNTÓ *We're in a tumultuous moment, and nowhere more so than Hong Kong. Your museum plans to open in March 2021. How has this time tested your ideas about museums?*

SUHANYA RAFFEL I have been thinking a lot about what it means to open a new museum in Hong Kong during a time when the world is changing so profoundly. I think change is actually a good thing. It can bring a level of energy and dynamism that is bracing but important. Change is part of the DNA of life. Change is learning. Change is surviving. So in a situation of intense change in Hong Kong, there is opportunity.

The M+ Museum collections are unique to Hong Kong and Asia. We are building an institution based on visual culture. What does visual culture mean for us? Structurally, it is bringing in collections of design, architecture, moving image, and visual art. Hong Kong has an important history of film, especially in relation to martial-arts cinema, a sophisticated design culture, fashion, and music, often expressed as cross-disciplinary interests. We also see a coherent radical ink practice that intersects with the deep history of ink within East Asian culture. The city is an international cosmopolitan center for the exchange of ideas. M+ is more than a museum of art.

When we look at what is happening in the world today in relation to diversity and voices that need to be heard, I feel as if our institution already embodies a reality that is being sought in other places. We are a pan-Asian workforce, with more than 75 percent of our staff from Hong Kong, working with colleagues from Europe, North America, Australia, and Asia. All of us have our own DNA as individuals. For example, I am Sri Lankan, Australian, now living in Hong Kong. This heterogeneity is incredibly powerful for a new institution in Hong Kong.

*You previously served in various roles in Australia. You led the Asia Pacific Triennial in the Queensland Art Gallery. You organized exhibitions in several museums worldwide. How have those experiences shaped the ideas you are testing out for M+?*

Crucially. Pivotally. Fundamentally. They underscore the point of view that I bring to M+. When I began working at the Queensland Art Gallery, in the early 1990s, we were embarking on the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art. Over twenty years, we built a collection of contemporary Asian and Pacific art, when no other institution was collecting contemporary art from that region. It was a blank page. The then-director, Doug Hall, established the triennial as a strategic means of thinking about what could distinguish us. He thought about the region, the neighborhood, Australia's demographics, its history of migration, and its relationship to China and Japan, the long history of exchanges across the Pacific region, which had never been spoken about within the formal canons of art history as established in the West.

I was very young when I joined this museum, and at that time I recall that we had a sense of adventure, as we really had nothing to lose. We roamed far and wide in our thinking, mirrored in the geography we covered. We were unfettered in where our advice came from: architects, filmmakers, fashion designers, performers, curators, and academics—we worked with individuals who had established interests in the places we, too, were interested in. At the time, this methodology was groundbreaking and unusual. Over the course of the twenty years from the early 1990s, a city of two million people that was frankly regional became the home to a museum that was a recognized global contender. The Queensland Art Gallery launched a cohort of professionals who are now dispersed around the world, contributing to the much-needed expanded dialogues in museums today.

*As you note, M+ has been conceived as a center for contemporary culture. What will be its most important contribution to society, particularly in Hong Kong?*

Hong Kong is an international financial center and business hub. The ambition to build a cultural capital is what initiated the West Kowloon Cultural District, in which M+ sits as a founding institution. There are other institutions devoted to the performing arts: the Xiqu Centre, for Chinese opera; Freespace, for contemporary music and jazz; the Lyric, for dance and drama, which will open two years after us. M+ is pivotal, as it establishes the first museum of twentieth- and twenty-first-century visual culture in Hong Kong, and in Asia.

What will it bring to Hong Kong? In Asia, we need to establish institutions of equivalence to those in Europe such as the Centre Pompidou in Paris, or those in the USA such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York. I firmly believe that the twenty-first century will be Asia-centered. We need to ensure that we have substantial public institutions in the region that own and deliver the stories and voices from our part of the world: to talk about our histories, our creative ideas and contributions, that are influencing global conversations. We need institutions of substance to ensure that these voices are recognized, along with the deep, complex roots that sustain and provide perspective. Hong Kong is well placed to do this, because it is a nodal point through which so many paths cross.

*Can you set M+ against this evolving landscape of institutions in the Southern Hemisphere in general, and Asia in particular? Which parts of the Western museum model translate and which ones do not?*

The institutional-structural model itself is the most immediate translation. A museum structured with a collection underpinned with policy, with proper collection management, with established due diligence around

intellectual property, with best practice around governance, a museum board—those are important structural tools that we have embraced. That translates well. And it is an important translation, because it is about recognition. Our peers recognize the best practice being embedded into the institution. Governance is an important aspect of our museum's ability to speak with academic and scholarly independence.

What doesn't always translate—and what is often an irritation—are the frequent questions about the ability of this institution, M+, or any museum in this part of the world, to actually express that scholarly, artistic, independent voice. What is happening right now in the United States, with the public protests erupting about race relations, is evidence that such independence is not always to be assumed elsewhere. Black, or for that matter, Asian histories and Indigenous histories that are deeply embedded in the history of the USA have now been recognized as they should long have been. Museums now have to start recalibrating to include these multiple histories.

What have we got here at M+, in this part of the world? Our opportunity is that we have not been burdened with collections and assumptions in the way these more established institutions have been formed, and they now have to carry forward and redress those histories. I don't have that particular burden to carry. That is enabling.

*The word "globalization" is unavoidable in these conversations. What does it mean to you?*

A double-edged sword. On the one hand it brings diversity to the forefront. As a species, we are restless. We move. We have always been driven by need or curiosity, or both. That need to journey and explore runs deep across centuries. We have always been global creatures. It is the volume in which that globalization now takes place that distinguishes the

twenty-first century. The speed, the numbers, and the economics that support the possibility for so many to move around.

The other side of the globalization debate is the sense that somehow everything is going to be the same—that each institution will somehow mirror the other. I don't believe this will be the case. Our survival is dependent on our not being the same. As soon as we are too much the same, we wither. The challenge is making that difference a positive thing, rather than descending into tribalism and violence.

*Up till now, museums were primarily influenced by European and North American models. What will be the biggest impact of the nascent Asian, especially Chinese, museum system on international museums?*

Hard to predict. Our community is still an early museum-going community. I need to build an informed audience base here in Hong Kong. In Queensland, we faced a similar situation at the beginning of the triennial. Brisbane didn't have a substantial habitual museum-going public. But within twenty years, attendance went from 30,000 in 1993 to more than 1.1 million by 2012. The local audience had become a hugely loyal interested public. In the Asian context, achieving such a success means ensuring that there is content that is recognized by the local audience as being relevant: "How does it relate to me and my life here?" We have been building a strong collection of contemporary Chinese and more broadly Asian art, design, and architecture that is positioned within a global context and that has yet to be introduced to the people of Hong Kong, Asia, and beyond. Its relevance will become apparent when people finally see it. Just having this institution will be a transformational change.