

## **Art: summary report**

*Iolanda Pensa*

Everyone is engaged in intercultural projects. People working in art, in the social field, in collaborative work, in the setting up of exhibitions; people making installations or organising workshops for students.

At a first glance we could say that in the last years there has been an incredible increase in intercultural initiatives; in actual fact, it's just more talk. Inter-culture is a key word: it alludes to a better world, the resolution of problems, dialogue, tolerance, the fight against crime, racism and incomprehension. It's the term used in social and cultural policies, and spoken, therefore, by those who fund these policies. In the last few years there has been a widespread use of the rhetoric of the intercultural: more than describing artistic projects, it is used as a means of selling them.

The aim of Interculture Map is to show that the artistic scene has produced intercultural activities and to describe how these methodologies can be applied in other fields. Very well, but there are three problems.

The first is that the primary goal of art is not the creation, production and distribution of intercultural projects, but rather of works of art – of course.

By seeing and interpreting artistic production from the point of view of the intercultural we give central prominence to a component which is not necessarily there as such: we are selecting works not on the basis of their quality, but rather on their ability to express that component (this is an incredibly widespread phenomena in the field of anthropological and social studies). After all, if we only take into consideration art works made with explicit intercultural goals, we reduce our point of view enormously, neglecting works and projects which, though not explicitly or necessarily intercultural, are capable of shedding new light on the issue.

A second problem is that in the field of art – more so than in other fields - everything can be seen as belonging to intercultural discourse. The idea of expression is deeply anchored in exchange and dialogue, and the world of art is inhabited by people from extremely different backgrounds and origins, working and consuming side by side. But to look for an intercultural practice whose aim is to solve problems is a different issue.

Art needn't solve problems: art observes problems, expresses them, interprets them, turns them upside down, plays with them; but art's purpose is not, and shouldn't be, to

resolve problems. Let's say we have a blank wall above our fire place, and that we would like to see it filled by an image of horses; or that we have a church dome which needs a bit of colour and so we look for someone to paint it; or we have a neighbourhood with a high crime rate and we want someone who can get young people engaged so as to keep them off the street. These are *our* problems, not those of artists: if they become the artists' problems, all we will get is a little decoration. There is a form of art known as *decorative* art – with all its languages and layers; it's our choice if this is the kind of art we wish to tell (see the first problem).

Finally, a third problem is the use of the word *immigrants*, which is misleading within a cultural context. We are all immigrants, whether we like it or not; and artistic production – differently from the social sector – is not obliged to produce categories, nor to face these problems (see second point). To consider the intercultural issue in art on the basis of whether immigrants are working with non immigrants, is a process which builds tension; the process should rather be one of highlighting expression and variety, independently from the participants' *pedigree*.

Art – intended as creative expression – is part of a methodology for intercultural knowledge and for learning about human rights: there are hand painting studios with Czech artists, theatre workshops with illegal immigrants, tam-tam music jams with Senegalese musicians, ballets with world costumes directed by Santa Chiara nuns...

But art – intended as a tool for *team building* – also exists in the more structured form of twenty children, with painted faces, dancing in a circle wearing little straw skirts.

International exchanges, cultural cooperation (e.g. **Rain Artist Initiative Project** of the Rijksacademy), relational art projects (**Artplaces**), inter and multi disciplinary works, workshops, partnerships, networks (**Artfactories**, **Triangles Arts Trust and Love Difference**), conferences, meetings, study visits and seminars; these are the kinds of activities we propose with our research; they are actually quite far from the idea of *actions which produce and develop a sense of collaboration and trust among the members of a group that is more or less extended* (precisely the definition of team building)

What mainly characterises art, within an intercultural perspective, is its ability to represent and to evoke.

*Artists* of different origins and backgrounds feel the need to tell stories about themselves

and the world, to express themselves on political and social issues, to intervene. Art works are capable of channelling the anguish and desires common to everyone: feelings of belonging and exclusion, of self-alienation, the awareness of inhabiting an unintelligible world. Self-representation and the theme of identity are strongly present (see **Contemporary African Database**), as are the projects aimed at a specific community or territory, which, due to the nature of the present, are inhabited by a diverse and changing fauna (see the research projects **Multiplicity**, **Milan habitable stories** and the maps **Wide City e Wider City**, **East Art Map**)

But that is not all. *Curators* and *producers* of different backgrounds and origins also feel the need to tell stories about themselves and the world, to express themselves on political and social issues, to intervene. The works of the artists become part of a meta-discourse which is capable of interpreting and multiplying meanings, as well as its advertising potential. The art works' containers i.e. exhibitions, biennials (see **Biennale di Venezia**, **Biennale di Dakar**), festivals (see **Ars Electronica**), institutions, museums, intercultural centres, concerts... All these can be seen as *new works* produced by curators-as-artists (or artists-as-curators): their artistic language is made up of *other art works*.

And that's not all. I won't repeat the whole phrase, but *governments and financial institutions* of different origins and backgrounds also feel the need for someone to tell them stories about the world; and, while they are doing so, they might resolve a couple of problems. Art becomes an instrument, promoted at times by very precise competition guidelines, to the point where there is a production of *ad hoc* projects (it is basically a way of outsourcing projects designed and organised by the institutions that are funding them). Other times there is a more open attitude, which allows for works to change perspective on the intercultural issue and to experiment with confusions and re-readings so as to produce something *other*.

It becomes very difficult to operate distinctions among those working in art: everyone does a bit of everything. There isn't a system comprised of elements i.e. artists, curators, critics, musicians, producers, gallery owners, collectors, commissioners, cultural operators, funding bodies; there is rather a fluid context, in which however can simultaneously occupy more than one role in succession. This is visible not only in the professional organisation of the environment, but also in the very nature of the works produced and presented nowadays. Far from being a new phenomena, we see how answers and content are being sought across different fields, encouraging exchange and

interaction between different disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, inter-culture, engineering, computer, cooperation, etc. There are collectively created works which, though not made to be works of art, become leading models (e.g. in visual art: the archive projects **AAVAA-**, **InIVA**; in architecture, performance, design, sound, and writing: **Third Text e Revue Noir**). The role and concept of the artist are now blurred and ready to morph according to his own needs or those of the curator. It's easy to get a sense of the problems this raises for institutions working within education.

By including works that are very different in technique and language, the sphere of the artist' influence is enlarged out of proportion. But not only this: the work is expanded so as to include and become a project. Being a project is the quality that best describes contemporary production: the artist's work expresses and manifests itself within a large collection of actions which, once added up, become the work. The expanded definition of artist and of art work as project enable the sphere of artistic production to include all those elements which are traditionally considered separate: institutions, exhibitions, pavilions, collections...

The intercultural issue is therefore a characteristic that permeates the whole art system and which cannot be scrutinised on the basis of the relation between maker and outcome. We can instead pick out two tendencies which can be summed up as the desire to represent and to participate.

As we were saying, both artists and curators (and all the subsidising institutions) feel the need to tell stories about themselves and the world, to express themselves on political and social issues, to intervene. This need is connected to heritage and to the more extensive debate on culture, inter-culture, trans-culture and multi-culture. A need for knowledge and new understandings encourages the exploration of the world, both far and near; there is work on history, on rewriting it, emphasising the role of *other* players and searching for different ways of narrating the past. And the excluded ones are added up.

This large reflection on the *others* yields to an inclusive politics within events, and to the public giving more attention to the issue. Events monitor the percentage of those represented, in the effort to produce a *rainbow show*. Nations count the races and communities present on their territory and define their priorities: more exchanges with a certain country, more exhibitions with artists *of that group*, more inquiries on those consumers (and readers), more subsidies for those who have them.

With the growing mobility and the ever increasing use of the internet as a tool for long distance work, freedom of expression, and concealment of nationality, institution and artists are looking for other paths, geared more towards power than inclusion. The promised land of the West is made up of a handful of large and international exhibitions and rich galleries spread over no more than five countries which, through a great metonymy, have come to coincide with Europe, North America, Japan and Australia. The mirage of the West is beginning to fade. Organisations from the *excluded world* i.e. all those who live in a desolate land, untouched by the air trajectories of VIPs – are getting organised in order to do what they want to do, in the ways they want to do it. There is a change in the concepts of place, artist, and work; other modes of representation and participation are being experimented with, leaving behind the word “culture” in order to focus on a new old word: *complexity*.

## **Bibliography**

- AA.VV., *All that Dutch: international cultural politics*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam 2005
- S. Baia Curioni, P. Nepoti (ed.), *La valutazione dei progetti culturali*, Egea, Milano 2004
- S. Bodo, M. Ruta Cifarelli (ed.), *Quando la cultura fa la differenza: patrimonio, arti e media nella società multiculturale*, Meltemi, Roma 2006
- A. Bonito Oliva, *Gratis: a bordo dell'arte*, Skira Editore, Genova-Milano 2000
- A. Bonito Oliva, *I fuochi dello sguardo: musei che reclamano attenzione*, Gangemi Editore, Roma 2004
- L. Buck, *Moving targets 2: A user's guide to British art now*, Tate Gallery Publishers, London 2000
- L. Buchholz, *The global rules of art, graduate symposium world art - Art world: changing perspectives on modern and contemporary art*, MOMA, New York 28-29 April 2006
- P. Colombo (ed.), *A regola d'arte: attualità e prospettive dei mestieri d'arte in Lombardia e Canton Ticino*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2005
- Commissione Europea, *Vademecum sulla gestione delle sovvenzioni (per richiedenti e beneficiari)*, November 1998
- E. Crispolti, *Come studiare l'arte contemporanea*, Donzelli Editore, Roma 1997

- M. Cristaldi (ed.), *Gli spazi dell'arte: atti dei convegni di Chiavari (16-17 aprile 1994) e di Sarzana (12-13 novembre 1994)*, Edizioni Mazzotta, Milano 1995
- A. Detheridge, A. Vettese, *Guardare l'arte: cultura visiva contemporanea: le recensioni, i temi e gli appuntamenti (1997-1999)*, Il Sole 24 Ore, Milano 1999
- G. Devlin, S. Hoyle, *Le financement de la culture en France et en Grande-Bretagne*, Conseil franco-britannique, L'Harmattan, Paris 2001
- J.M. Djian, *Politique culturelle: la fin d'un mythe*, Gallimard, Paris 2005
- G. Duplat, *Une vague belge*, Editions Racine, Bruxelles 2005
- W. Santagata (ed.), *Economia dell'Arte: istituzioni e mercati dell'arte e della cultura*, Utet Liberia Srl, Torino 1998
- R. Ferrario, L. Masserini (ed.), *Professione curator: organizzazione e comunicazione delle arti visive - Corso di formazione post laurea - IV Edizione 2000-2001*, Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milano 2002
- M. Gravari-Barbas, P. Violier (ed.), *Lieux de culture/culture des lieux: production(s) culturelle(s) locale(s) et émergence des lieux: dynamiques, acteurs, enjeux*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Rennes 2003
- G. Guerzoni, S. Stabile, *I diritti dei musei: valorizzazione dei beni culturali nella prospettiva del rights management*, Estas, Milano 2003
- N. Kotler, P. Kotler, *Marketing dei musei: obiettivi, traguardi, risorse*, Einaudi, Torino 1999 (original edition: *Museum strategy and marketing: designing missions building audiences generation revenue and resources*, Jossey-Bass Inc. Publishers, San Francisco 1998)
- Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, *Re-thinking art exchanges. Towards a European foreign cultural policy / October 2004*, Statements of the conference organised by IFA, Berlin, October 2004
- G. Maraniello (ed.), *Arte in Europa: 1990-2000*, Skira Editore, Milano 2002
- G. Mosquera, J. Fisher (ed.), *Over here: international perspectives on art and culture*, New museum of contemporary art, New York, The MIT Press, Cambridge - Massachusetts - London 2004
- NAJP - National arts journalism program, *The new gate keepers: emerging challenges to free expression in the arts*, Columbia University, New York 2003
- Osservatorio Impresa e Cultura (ed.), *Cultura e competitività: per un nuovo agire imprenditoriale*, Rubbettino Editore, Sovaria Mannelli, Catanzaro 2003
- Osservatorio Impresa e Cultura (ed.), *La defiscalizzazione dell'investimento culturale: il*

- panorama italiano e internazionale*, Sipi srl, Roma 2003
- F. Poli, *Il sistema dell'arte contemporanea*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1999
- M. Poma, *Arte comunicazione impresa*, Guerini, Milano 2003
- A. Quemin, *L'illusion de l'abolition des frontières dans le monde de l'art contemporain international: la place des pays "périphériques" à "l'ère de la globalisation et du métissage"*, in «Sociologie et Sociétés», vol. 34, n. 2, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, Montréal 2002, pp. 15-40
- Rain artists' initiatives network (ed.), *Shifting map: artists' platforms and strategies for cultural diversity*, Nai Publishers, Rotterdam 2004
- Relazioni sulle politiche culturali in Europa*, Council of Europe
- Admical (ed.), *Répertoire du mécénat d'entreprise 2004*, Admical, Paris 2004
- S. Ricossa (ed.), *I mercati dell'arte: aspetti pubblici e privati*, Umberto Allemandi & Co., Torino 1991
- P.L. Sacco, W. Santagata, M. Trimarchi, *L'arte contemporanea italiana nel mondo: analisi e strumenti*, Opera DARC Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali, Direzione Generale per l'architettura e l'arte contemporanea, Skira Editore, Milano 2005
- K. Teige, *Il mercato dell'arte: l'arte tra capitalismo e rivoluzione*, Einaudi, Torino 1973
- R. Vescia, *Aujourd'hui, le mécénat*, Cercle d'Art, Paris 1996
- A. Vettese, *Artisti si diventa*, Carocci, Roma 1998
- A. Vettese, *Capire l'arte contemporanea*, Umberto Allemandi & Co, Torino 1998
- J.P. Warnier, *La mondialisation de la culture*, La Découverte, Paris 1999
- Z. Wicomb, *Five Afrikaner texts and the rehabilitation of whiteness*, in «Chimurenga», dossier "Kaapstad! (and Jozi, the night Moses died)", vol. 7, Capetown 2005, pp. 26-35
- T. Wolfe, *Come ottenere il successo in arte*, Umberto Allemandi & Co., Torino-Londra, 1987 (edizione originale: *The painted world*, Ferrar, Strauss & Giroux, New York 1975)