

ABSTRACT

Institutional Critique: Artists Focus on Museological Issues

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This thesis looks at important issues facing American museums through a form art called “institutional critique.” Institutional critique artwork can be defined broadly as artwork of varying mediums that offer criticism of museums or galleries, referring sometimes to an institution as a whole and at others to specific practices. This thesis makes the case that institutional critique artwork is one tool that can help us to understand the problems facing museums today. In particular, institutional critique artwork can highlight problems museums have with collections, boards of trustees, corporate sponsorship, museum architecture, and education/ visitor experiences. Recent literature on the subject has contextualized institutional critique artwork in regards to art history, but so far has failed to utilize it as a museum studies tool. The museum community has – and continues to – address these problems, but these artists can express in often vivid form what are sometimes seemingly dry museological issues.

Institutional Critique: Artists Focus on Museological Issues

by

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A Thesis

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The second half of the twentieth century saw a number of movements in American art. The variety of movements during this time is a reflection of the change and conflict the United States was undergoing. In Erika Doss's book, *Twentieth Century American Art*, she breaks down the second half of the twentieth century of American Art into the following sections: Abstract Expressionism, Neo-Dada and Pop Art, Minimalism and Conceptual Art, Feminist Art and Black Art, The Culture Wars: The 80s, and Contemporary Art.¹ Abstract Expressionism rose to prominence in the 1940s and 1950s with famous practitioners Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, and Ad Reinhardt. Abstract Expressionism was noted for its non-objective paintings that were supposed to induce emotions in the viewer. Jackson Pollock and Willem de Koonig were known for their gestural or "action painting," a way of laying paint on the canvas that recorded the movement of the artist. Mark Rothko and Ad Reinhardt were known for their "Color Field" paintings that consisted of large shapes of color. The mid 1950s and 1960s saw the rise of Neo-Dada and Pop Art. The Neo-Dada movement expanded upon the "antiart" of Marcel Duchamp and other Dada artists.² Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg are famous Neo-Dada artists. Rauschenberg was noted for his "combine" paintings in which he combined found objects and gestural painting. Johns is known for his series of American Flags and targets made with encaustic, which is paint mixed with

¹Erika Lee Doss, *Twentieth-Century American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²H. Harvard Arnason and Marla Prather, *History of Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Photography* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 482, 484.

wax. Pop Art was a response to commercialization and mass produced items. Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein are famous Pop Artists. Warhol used a silkscreen process to reproduce images. Lichtenstein is known for his cartoon-styled paintings. The 1960s and 1970s brought about Minimalism and Conceptual art. Minimalist artists were interested in reducing art to the simplest forms and evoking reactions from viewers. Frank Stella is known for both his minimalist paintings and sculptures and use of “pin stripes.” Conceptual artists focused on the “idea” behind an artwork rather than on the “object” or realism in their art. Famous Conceptual artists include Vito Acconci, Hans Haacke, and Joseph Kosuth. Some of Joseph Kosuth’s Conceptual art involved juxtaposing in a gallery space the definition of an object, a photograph of the object, and the actual object.

From these major art movements, a minor movement, “institutional critique” emerged. As Doss notes in her book, the last decades of the twentieth century brought about artists who “critiqued the ideological practices and structures of museums, considering the ways in which the collection and display of art speak to the relationships of power, representation, and cultural and national identity.”³ Institutional critique can be defined broadly as artwork of varying mediums that assess critically the museum or gallery as an institution and/ or their practices. The term *institutional critique* was first used in print in an essay on the artist, Louise Lawler, in 1985, but scholars agree that institutional critique had its beginnings long before the term was coined.⁴ Most scholars examining the origins of institutional critique art see Marcel Duchamp as one of its

³Doss, 243.

⁴Southern California Consortium of Art Schools Symposia and John Welchman, *Institutional Critique and After* (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2006), 124.

earliest predecessors with his two different series of “portable museums” containing miniatures of his most famous artwork. One series was made in the 1930s and 1940s while the other was made in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵

Artists from the 1960s and 1970s whose artwork can be described as institutional critique include Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, and Hans Haacke. In the eighties artists like Sophie Calle, The Guerilla Girls, Barbara Kruger, and Louise Lawler appeared on the institutional critique scene.⁶ King and Marstine write, “informed by feminist theory ... [these artists] challenged gendered formulas of representation, including the concept of originality, the use of authoritative wall texts, the beliefs in universality, and the production of spectacle.”⁷ The late 1980s also saw the emergence of institutional critique artists Mark Dion, Andrea Fraser, and Fred Wilson.⁸

This thesis makes the case that institutional critique artwork can serve as a tool to better understand the problems facing museums today. I argue that institutional critique artwork can highlight problems museum’s have with: collections, boards of trustees, corporate sponsorship, museum architecture, and education/ visitor experiences.

Chapter Two examines the key practitioners of institutional critique artwork that are discussed in later chapters. Chapter Three reviews the literature relating to institutional critique artists and their artwork. The fourth chapter uses the institutional critique artwork of the key practitioners mentioned in the second chapter to examine

⁵Marilyn Stokstad, *Art History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 1148.

⁶Lydia King and Janet Marstine, “The University Museum and Gallery: A site for Institutional Critique and a focus for the Curriculum,” in *New Museum Theory: An Introduction*, ed. Janet Marstine (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 269.

⁷King and Marstine, 269.

⁸King and Marstine, 269.

problems in museums, while the fifth chapter is a critique of institutional critique artwork. The work concludes with recommendations that institutional critique artwork be used by students of museum studies.

CHAPTER TWO

Institutional Critique Artists and Case Studies

Key Artists

One must examine institutional critique artists and their artwork formally to better understand institutional critique artwork as a whole. Listed in alphabetical order, each artist is addressed with a short biographical sketch followed by a description of one of their artworks. Some artists have more than one artwork discussed in later chapters; however only one is mentioned in this section in order not to be repetitive.

Vito Acconci

Vito Acconci is an American artist born in 1940. He received his bachelor's degree in 1962 from the College of Holy Cross, and a master of fine arts in 1964 from the University of Iowa. He is a sculptor, performance, and video artist currently residing in Brooklyn, New York.¹

Acconci's *Proximity Piece* from 1970 was a performance piece at The Jewish Museum in which Acconci invaded other visitors' personal space. Acconci followed a chosen visitor throughout the museum, making the visitor part of his art piece. A small panel on the wall hinted at Acconci's performance, but there was nothing to assure that

¹"Acconci, Vito," in *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T000324> (accessed October 29, 2008).

visitors read the said panel. Photographs from the performances are the only records of the piece.²

L. A. Angelmaker

L. A. Angelmaker is the pseudonym of Robert Thrill. Angelmaker's *Bad Penny: For Museum Purchase Only*, from 1996, is one of a series of altered auction catalogs from Christie's or Sotheby's within a Plexiglas case. For the piece, Angelmaker has "traced nine artworks and art objects that were sold by major American museums to private collectors through the auction houses Christie's and Sotheby's during one month in 1996."³ He commemorates the deaccessioned artwork and art objects by taking each auction catalog the art can be found in, and cutting into the catalog to reveal the photo of the art. The then altered auction catalog is placed within a vertical standing Plexiglas case and then on top of large white rectangular pedestal. Angelmaker also displayed one "original," a deaccessioned object, along with the eight altered auction catalogs. Part of the installation at the Momena Gallery included Angelmaker showing letters he sent to the art museums that deaccessioned art, offering his services to try to buy back the art. Angelmaker also offered his altered auction catalogs as available for purchase. He made it known though that if they bought both his work and the previously deaccessioned items, his work and the deaccessioned items would have to be displayed in the contemporary section. Angelmaker felt that though the deaccessioned items were made

²Kynaston McShine, *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 170.

³Jennifer Dalton, "L. A. Angelmaker: Art 'n' Money sittin' in tree," *Stim* 10.5 (June 25, 1997), <http://www.stim.com/Stim-x/10.5/angel/angel.html> (accessed October 29, 2008).

in different periods, they now belonged in the contemporary section because their meaning had been changed.

Michael Asher

Michael Asher is an American artist born in 1943 who received his bachelor's degree from the University of California at Irvine in 1967. He describes his artwork for the 1999 exhibition, *The Museum as Muse: Artists reflect*, at the Museum of Modern Art as:

My project for the exhibition the *The Museum as Muse: Artists reflect* is a printed inventory of all the paintings and sculptures that have been deaccessioned, and thereby subtracted, from the permanent holdings since the founding of The Museum of Modern Art.⁴

In response MOMA published, *Painting and Sculpture from The Museum of Modern Art: Catalog of Deaccessions 1929 through 1998 by Michael Asher*. Compiled by an intern, the catalog included an introduction by Asher explaining the project and a note from one of the museum's chief curators regarding the museum's policy on deaccessions.⁵ The catalog was available for perusing in the exhibition area, and a free copy was available to the public in the museum store with their museum ticket.⁶ Asher's artwork is not a work of art in a conventional medium such as an oil painting or a marble sculpture. Asher's printed inventory is more about the concept it represents than the medium it is. Brigit Peltzer states, "Some humor is related to the substitution in the

⁴McShine, 156. See Kirsi Peltomäki, *Strategies of Institutional Critique Art in Recent American Art* (PhD diss., University of Rochester Press, 2001), 153-159, for more information regarding MOMA and Michael Asher's *Untitled* (1999).

⁵Peltomäki, 154.

⁶Peltomäki, 158.

canon here. Where an artwork is expected, a chronology is displayed as a list of object no longer present.”⁷

Daniel Buren

Daniel Buren, born in France in 1938, is a painter and conceptual artist. He is known for his placement of white and colored stripes on different materials including walls, fabrics, stairs, and buildings.⁸

Buren’s *Une enveloppe peut en cache une autre* from 1989 is a site-specific work at the Musee Rath in Geneva. The outside of the neo-classical Museum building is partially obscured by Buren’s signature vertical stripes.⁹ Claire Bishop sees Buren’s use of stripes as a way “...to undermine its authority as a privileged venue for art.”¹⁰ With the simple application of the black and white stripes, Buren is able to elevate everyday items into “art.”

Sophie Calle

Sophie Calle is a French artist born in 1953, and currently lives in Paris. Calle’s *Last Seen...* from 1991 is site-specific work for the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Calle explains her artwork:

On March 18, 1990, five drawings by Degas, one vase, one Napoleonic eagle, and six paintings by Rembrandt, Flinck, Manet, and Verneer – were stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. In front of the spaces left empty, I

⁷McShine, 157.

⁸Alfred Pacquement, “Buren, Daniel,” in *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T012348> (accessed October 29, 2008).

⁹Pacquement. James Putnam, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 161.

¹⁰Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 33.

asked curators, guards, and other staff members to describe for me their recollections of the missing objects.¹¹

Sally Yard has noted that the directives of Isabella Stewart Gardner's will "enforce the perpetual impression of the stolen art's absence, since this dauntless Victorian woman had determined that the rooms at Fenway Court should remain just as she had arranged them."¹² Each stolen piece is invoked with a framed photo of its location in the museum and then a framed piece with text from the staff about their thoughts on the stolen piece. The framed text piece is the same dimensions of the stolen artwork to which it is responding.¹³

Janet Cardiff

Janet Cardiff, a Canadian artist, was born in 1957. She received her bachelor's of fine arts from Queens University in Ontario in 1980, and her master's from the University of Alberta in Edmonton in 1983. She resides and works in both Canada and in Germany.¹⁴ Cardiff is known for her "Walks," or site-specific audio.

Cardiff's *Chiaroscuro* from 1997 is one such "Walk" and her first "Walk" inside a museum. Cardiff's *Chiaroscuro* engages the viewer to look at the space and people in it in a different way.¹⁵ Most visitors to art museums are passive bystanders and separate

¹¹McShine, 136.

¹²McShine, 136.

¹³Putnam, 106.

¹⁴Janet Cardiff and Georges Bures Miller, "About," Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, <http://www.cardiffmiller.com/about.html> (accessed October 29, 2008).

¹⁵McShine, 166.

from the art they are viewing. Cardiff subverts this traditional relationship, by making the visitor an active participant in her art.

Christo

Though known by the moniker Christo, Christo's full name is Christo Javacheff. He was born in Bulgaria in 1935, and studied at both the Academy of Fine Arts in Sofia and in Vienna. He currently resides in New York, and often collaborates with his wife and partner, Jeanne-Claude.

Christo is renowned for his artistic practice of *empaquetage* or packaging. Christo first started "wrapping" objects in canvas and ropes and then eventually moved on to a larger scale.¹⁶ Christo's *The Museum of Modern Art Wrapped: Project for New York* from 1971 is a proposed project that never came to fruition. The proposed artwork shows the MOMA completely wrapped in canvas and rope, standing out against the New York City scene.

Rose Finn-Kelcey

British artist Rose Finn-Kelcey was born in 1945 and studied at Ravensbourne College of Art and at the Chelsea School of Art in London. She currently resides in London.¹⁷ Finn-Kelcey started in the in 1970s as a performance artist before moving on to various mediums.¹⁸

¹⁶Ian Chivers. "Christo," in *The Oxford Companion to Western Art*, ed. Hugh Brigstocke, *Oxford Art Online*, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t118/e543> (accessed October 29, 2008).

¹⁷Artfacts.Net, "Rose Finn-Kelcey," Artfacts.Net Ltd., <http://www.artfacts.net/index.php/pageType/artistInfo/artist/11329> (accessed October 29, 2008).

¹⁸Catalogue Netherlands Media Art Institute, "Rose Finn-Kelcey Biography," Netherlands Media Art Institute, http://catalogue.montevideo.nl/artist_biography.php?id=820 (accessed October 29, 2008).

Made out of numerous metallic colored coins, Finn-Kelcey's artwork is displayed on gallery floor. There is a small platform adjacent to the gallery floor that allows visitors to look at the artwork from above. Next to the piece is a person sitting in a chair in the guise of a museum guard to protect the very expensive piece of art.¹⁹ This "museum guard" is actually part of the artwork.

Andrea Fraser

Andrea Fraser was born in 1965. An American artist, she attended the School of Visual Arts, New York from 1982 to 1984 and the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program from 1984 to 1986. Fraser is known for not only her artwork but also her critical essays on institutional critique artwork and practitioners.

Fraser acted as the fictitious docent, Jane Castleton, in *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* performed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1989. Photographs are the only records of this performance piece, showing Fraser in the guise of her docent character. As Jane Castleton, Fraser was able to lampoon traditional docent tours by pointing out a museum cloakroom or bathroom.²⁰

Peter Greenaway

Peter Greenaway was born Wales, educated in England, and currently lives in Amsterdam. Greenaway is known mainly as a film director with twelve feature films and

¹⁹Putnam, 91.

²⁰Putnam, 98.

fifty short films and documentaries to his name. His most famous and critically acclaimed film is 1989's *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife & her Lover*.²¹

His work *The Physical Self*, from 1991, included in vitrines both live nude models and sculptures of the human body.²² As part of a seven-week exhibition, Greenaway had four vitrines filled from a pool of thirty models. The models were of varying ages and gender and posed in various positions for two-hour shifts. The models were juxtaposed with classical sculptures. Author David Pascoe says in his book on Greenway that models served as conduit between the viewer and models used in the artwork in the exhibition.²³

Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Coco Fusco

Guillermo Gomez-Pena was born and raised in Mexico. He came to the United States in 1978 to study at Cal Arts, and currently resides in San Francisco, where he is both a performance artist and writer.²⁴ Coco Fusco was born in Cuba in 1960.²⁵ Based in New York, Fusco is currently the Chair of the Fine Art Department at Parsons/ The

²¹Peter Greenway, "Biography Peter Greenway," Peter Greenway official site, <http://www.petergreenaway.info/content/view/25/42/> (accessed October 29, 2008).

²²Putnam, 32.

²³David Pascoe, *Peter Greenway: museums and moving images* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 213, <http://books.google.com/books?id=wMiBP2osR3oC&printsec=copyright&dq=peter+greenaway+the+physical+self#PPP1,M1> (accessed October 29, 2008).

²⁴Guillermo Gomez-Pena, "Who are Pocha? Guillermo Gomez-Pena," Gomez-Pena's La Pocha Nostra, <http://www.pochanostra.com/who/> (accessed October 29, 2008).

²⁵the-artists.org, "Coco Fusco," the-artists.org, http://the-artists.org/artist/Coco_Fusco.html (accessed October 29, 2008).

New School of Design. Fusco is known for both her performances and use of electronic media.²⁶

Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Coco Fusco's *The Year of the White Bear: Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* from 1992 was a performance piece performed at the National Museum of American History, The Field Museum, and the Whitney Biennial.²⁷ Their artwork was in part a reaction to the 500th anniversary of Columbus "discovering" America. Gomez-Pena and Fusco performed the part of "Guatinaui aborigines" in "native" costumes in a large cage structure. The cage allowed viewers to see the two performers engage in activities like watching TV and lifting weights.²⁸ Fusco states, "as we assumed the stereotypical role of the domesticated savage, many audience members felt entitled to assume the role of colonizer, only to find themselves uncomfortable with the implications of the game."²⁹

The Guerilla Girls

The Guerilla Girls are a group of anonymous women artists and performers, who hide their identities behind "King Kong" masks. The name "Guerilla Girls" is a play on their "gorilla" masks and "guerilla" tactics. Individual member's monikers are the names of famous deceased female artists like Frida Kahlo or Eva Hesse. The group was formed originally to protest the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition "An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture" curated by Kynaston McShine. Of the 169 artists

²⁶Coco Fusco, "Bio for Coco Fusco," Coco Fusco, <http://www.cocofusco.com/> (accessed October 29, 2008).

²⁷Doss, 245.

²⁸Doss, 246.

²⁹qtd. in Doss, 246.

included in the exhibition, only 13 were women. The Guerilla Girls protested this fact in front of the museum, but this made little significant impact. Noticing this, the Guerilla Girls switched to ad style posters that they placed all over the New York City neighborhood of SoHo. This method was successful in gaining the public's attention to the issues they highlighted. The Guerilla Girls focused not only on the lack of representation of women artists in museums, but of people of color as well.³⁰ Frank Frangenberg writes, "All the Guerilla Girls wanted was museum and gallery art to reflect a true picture of cultural history, not merely the part contributed by males."³¹

The *Guerilla Girls' Code of Ethics for Art Museums* from 1989 is an ad style piece with the title of the work in bold over two tablets with ten commandments, listing a code of ethics for art museums.

Hans Haacke

German artist Hans Haacke was born in Cologne in 1936. He studied at the Staatliche Hochschule fur Bildende Künste in Kallen from 1956 to 1960, Atelier 17 in Paris from 1960 to 1961, and in Philadelphia from 1961 to 1962 at the Tyler School of Art.³²

Haacke's *Seurat's "Les Poseuses" (Small Version), 1888-1975* from 1975 traces the ownership of a pointillist painting by Georges Seurat of three nudes in front of his most famous painting, *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte - 1884*.

³⁰Uta Grosenick and Ilka Becker, *Women Artists in the 20th and 21st Century* (Koln: Taschen, 2001), 72.

³¹Grosenick and Becker, 75.

³²McShine, 253.

Haacke produced a series of fourteen panels reproducing the Seurat painting at the top and below it providing information on each of the owners.³³

Richard Hamilton

Richard Hamilton is a British artist born in 1932. He attended the St. Martin's School of Art, the Royal Academy Schools, and the Slade School of Fine Art all located in London, where he resides. Hamilton is known as painter and printmaker. His collage *Just What Is It that Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?* from 1956 includes a figure holding a Tootsie Pop, thereby making a direct reference to the "Pop" movement.³⁴

Hamilton turns Frank Lloyd Wright's famous Guggenheim building into fine art in his reliefs, *The Solomon R. Guggenheim (Black and White)*, *The Solomon R. Guggenheim (Black)*, *The Solomon R. Guggenheim (Gold)*, and *The Solomon R. Guggenheim (Spectrum)*. from 1965-66.³⁵ The four reliefs have different colors as described in the parentheses in the titles of each artwork. "Spectrum" refers to the spectrum of colors and this artwork has all the colors of the rainbow.

³³McShine, 154.

³⁴*30,000 Years of Art: The Story of Human Creativity Across Time and Space* (London: Phaidon, 2007), 977.

³⁵McShine, 110-111.

James Luna

James Luna is a Luiseno Indian. Luna received his Bachelor's of fine arts from the University of California Irvine and a Master's of Science from San Diego State University. Luna is known for his performance and installation art.³⁶

Luna's *The Artifact Piece* from 1986 was first performed at the San Diego Museum of Man. The artist himself was on exhibit lying in a sand filled rectangular vitrine.³⁷ Luna's official website states, "The Artifact Piece, 1987, was a performance/installation that questioned American Indian presentation in museums- presentation that furthered stereotype, denied contemporary society and one that did not enable an Indian viewpoint."³⁸

Allan McCollum

Born in 1944, American artist Allan McCollum lives in New York.³⁹ McCollum has no formal art training.⁴⁰ McCollum's *Plaster Surrogates* from 1982-84 and *Plaster Surrogates* from 1982-89 are two similar installations of what appear to be multitudes of gray framed, white matted, black rectangles on a white gallery walls. Each object is actually made of plaster and painted to look like black rectangles with a white matte in a

³⁶James Luna, "The Artifact Piece," The James Luna Project, <http://www.jamesluna.com/> (accessed October 29, 2008).

³⁷Doss, 245.

³⁸Luna.

³⁹Allan McCollum, "Allan McCollum Biography/Bibliography," Allan McCollum, <http://home.att.net/~allanmcnyc/amcbio.html> (accessed October 29, 2008).

⁴⁰"McCollum, Allan," in *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T052738> (accessed October 31, 2008).

gray frame.⁴¹ Allan McCollum writes on art being displayed in museums, “Whenever I walk into a museum, I am very much aware – and maybe this is because I have sometimes worked in museums for money, as a laborer – of the fact I had nothing to do with choosing what got there.”⁴²

Cornelia Parker and Tilda Swinton

British artist, Cornelia Parker, was born in 1956. She studied at Gloucestershire College of Art and Design, Wolverhampton Polytechnic and at Reading University. She had a residency at ArtPace in San Antonio, Texas.⁴³ Born Katherine Matilda Swinton in 1960, British actress, Tilda Swinton, was educated at Cambridge University. Swinton received a Best Supporting Actress Academy Award for her work in the movie, *Michael Clayton*.⁴⁴

Performed at the Serpentine Gallery in 1995, Swinton lay on mattress in a vitrine a pretended to be asleep during the opening hours of the exhibition. Louisa Buck wrote about the performance in *ArtForum*. She writes, “For seven consecutive days, eight hours a day, she [Swinton] lay motionless, eyes closed, in a raised, glass casket - a contemporary Sleeping Beauty in jeans and deck shoes, subject to intense scrutiny and speculation.”⁴⁵

⁴¹Fraser and Alberro, 29-30.

⁴²McShine, 144.

⁴³Tate Britain, “Cornelia Parker Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View,” Tate Britain, <http://www.tate.org.uk/colddarkmatter/texts.htm> (accessed October 29, 2008).

⁴⁴TildaSwinton.Net, “Biography,” TildaSwinton.Net, http://tildaswinton.net/?page_id=81 (accessed October 29, 2008).

⁴⁵Louisa Buck, “Boxing Tilda,” *Artforum* (Jan. 1996), http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_n5_v34/ai_18017237 (accessed October 29, 2008).

Ad Reinhardt

American Ad Reinhardt was born in 1913 and died in 1967. He is famous for both his art and writing. Reinhardt was a leading practitioner of the Color Field movement of Abstract Expressionism, but was also known for his satirical cartoons.⁴⁶ He graduated from Columbia University in 1935, and continued his artistic studies at the National Academy of Design and the American Artists' School.⁴⁷ Arnason states, "During the sixties and seventies, Reinhardt was much admired by Minimalist artists and became something of a cult figure among Conceptual artists, partly due to his writings and his extreme positions on the nature and the function of the artists."⁴⁸

Reinhardt's *How Modern is the Museum of Modern Art?* from 1940 is an ad style flyer for the American Abstract Artists. Like its title, the flyer asks questions such as "What does 'modern' mean?", "Is the museum a business?", and "What is this – a three ring circus?"⁴⁹

Three Case Studies

In his book, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium*, James Putnam writes, "Contemporary Art can be installed in existing museums in such a way to give rise to an immediate dialogue with established collections, displays, architecture, and public

⁴⁶Arnason, 428.

⁴⁷The Guggenheim Collection, "Ad Reinhardt Biography," The Guggenheim Collection, http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist_bio_133A.html (accessed October 31, 2008)

⁴⁸Arnason, 429.

⁴⁹McShine, 209.

services.”⁵⁰ In this section, I will examine three famous installation critique art exhibitions.

The Play of the Unmentionable

Joseph Kosuth, an American artist, was born in 1945 in Toledo, Ohio. He studied at the Toledo Museum School of Design, Cleveland Art Institute, the School of the Visual Arts in New York City, and privately under painter Line Bloom Draper. Kosuth has been on the faculty of the School of the Visual Arts since 1968. He resides in both Belgium and New York.⁵¹

Kosuth’s *The Play of the Unmentionable* in 1990 at the Brooklyn Museum of Art was part of the museum’s Grand Lobby series where artists were allowed to create site-specific works. Kosuth chose to exhibit items in the Brooklyn Museum of Art’s collection that had been associated with controversy. He focused mainly on propriety in art, adult and child nudity, and religious and political controversy. Kosuth’s artistic interpretation was seen in the selection of the artworks, the grouping and arrangements of the artworks on display, and the juxtaposition of text to the artwork. Some of the works that Kosuth showcases are now considered masterpieces, but at some point were considered controversial. In an interview for the exhibition catalog, Kosuth says, “The paintings by Matisse and Picasso and Braque are ones that every good Republican would

⁵⁰Putnam, 154.

⁵¹The Guggenheim Collection, “Joseph Kosuth Biography,” Guggenheim Collection, http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist_bio_79.html (accessed October 29, 2008).

love to hang in his dining room, but children were prohibited from seeing them when they appeared here in 1913.”⁵²

Mining the Museum

American artist Fred Wilson was born in 1954. Wilson got his bachelor of fine arts from the State University of New York at Purchase in 1976. Wilson’s experience in museums includes working in the educational departments of the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He also worked as an art installer at the Museum of Modern Art.⁵³

The Contemporary at Baltimore invited Fred Wilson to choose any participating museum in Baltimore, to investigate their collections, and to create an installation from it. Wilson chose the Maryland Historical Society, and his 1994 work was entitled *Mining the Museum*. He chose to display slave shackles amidst highly ornate silver, a rough wooden whipping post surrounded by decorative chairs, and the white hood and dress of the Ku Klux Klan inside a baby carriage.⁵⁴ Wilson’s juxtaposition of objects forces the viewer to examine the relationship of the objects, for example, slavery provided slave-owners with the means to have expensive items like silver and highly stylized furniture. When viewing furniture and silver in museums, this fact is often forgotten. His arrangement of objects deviates from the former standard of grouping like items together, and is example of the evolution of exhibits in museums.

⁵²Joseph Kosuth and David Freeberg, *The Play of the Unmentionable: An installation by Joseph Kosuth at the Brooklyn Museum* (New York: New Press, 1992), 27.

⁵³Kathan Brown, “Fred Wilson,” *Magical-Secrets: A Printmaking Community*, <http://www.magical-secrets.com/artists/Wilson> (accessed October 29, 2008).

⁵⁴Marjorie Schwarzer, *Riches, Rivals, & Radicals: 100 years of Museums in America* (Washington, D. C.: American Association of Museums, 2006), 167.

Tate Thames Dig

Mark Dion, an American artist, was born in 1961. From 1980 to 1981, Dion studied at the Hartford School of Art at the University of Connecticut, and from 1982 to 1984, he attended the School of the Visual Arts in New York.

Mark Dion's *Tate Thames Dig* involved the excavation of two sites along the Thames, the classifying and preserving of the objects found, and the displaying of the objects in a *Wunderkammer*, also known as a Cabinet of Curiosity. Dion allowed audiences to view all three parts of his work, explaining, "The early history of the museum is very relevant to the work of Mark Dion because in the course of his work he is re-creating and in a way re-defining the whole process of display."⁵⁵ Dion's work has been compared to Marcel Broodthaers. Like most institutional critique artwork, Dion *Tate Thames Dig* is a site-specific work.

⁵⁵Mark Dion and Alex Coles, *Mark Dion: Archaeology* (London: Black Dog, 1999), 20.

CHAPTER THREE

Literature Review and Findings

Literature on Institutional Critique Artwork

It is important to review what has been written previously on institutional critique art and artists to know what has already been covered as well as discovering what is missing in the literature. The literature is listed by title and organized by publication date.

Museum by Artists

In the introduction to *Museums by Artists*, Peggy Gale, one of the two editors of the book, writes that the relationship between museums and artists expressed via their artwork first came about in the late 1960s and 1970s. Gale elaborates, “much of the art of the late Sixties and Seventies, reductive and often language-based, questioned the roles of museum, dealer, collector, public, often rejecting the object-centered assumptions of construction and sale of works and the attendant requirements of exhibition collection and hierarchy.”¹ First published in 1983, *Museums by Artists* is one of the first books to deal with institutional critique artists and their art. Containing institutional critique artwork by various artists from previous exhibitions, the books combines them together under the “museum” subject. From there the work is then split into three different categories: The Museum as Format, Collections (both literal and conceptual), and

¹A. A. Bronson and Peggy Gale, *Museums by Artists* (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983), 8.

Museum Ideology and History.² The book examines artwork by numerous artists including Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Marcel Duchamp, Hans Haacke, and Joseph Kosuth. *Museum by Artists* contains essays by various authors including the artists themselves. Hans Haacke's "All the Art That's Fit to Show" was originally a statement for a 1974 exhibition catalogue. Daniel Buren's contribution to the book includes three reprinted essays from the early 1970s, "Function of the Museum," "Function of the Studio," and "Function of the Architecture." In the "Function of the Museum," Buren states that the museum plays three distinct roles: an aesthetic role, an economic role, and mystical role. Buren also feels that the museum must preserve, collect, and act as a refuge as well.³ In "Function of Architecture" Buren has a subject heading "The Cube. White. Idealism."⁴ He states, "This white and 'neutral' cube is therefore not as innocent, but is in fact the value-giving repository already often mentioned."⁵

Brian O'Doherty, The White Cube

Brian O'Doherty's essays, "Notes on the Gallery Space," "The Eye and the Spectator," and "Context as Content," in his book *The White Cube* were previously published in 1976 in *Artforum*. In "Notes on a Gallery Space," O'Doherty discusses the gallery space's impact on the artwork placed within its walls. O'Doherty writes, "We have now reached a point where we see not the art but the *space* first. (A cliché of the

²Bronson and Gale, 8.

³Bronson and Gale, 57-59.

⁴Bronson and Gale, 71.

⁵Bronson and Gale, 71.

age is to ejaculate over the space on entering a gallery).”⁶ In “The Eye and the Spectator,” O’Doherty examines the “eye,” the visual receptor of art, and its relationship with the “spectator,” a critical thinker.⁷ O’Doherty believes that the artwork of the 1970s has moved away from the “eye” but toward the “spectator.”⁸ O’Doherty states in “Context as Content,” “the white wall’s apparent neutrality is an illusion. It stands for a community with common ideas and assumptions.”⁹ By “Context as Content,” O’Doherty means that the artwork itself creates the framework for viewing in the gallery space.¹⁰ “Never was a space, designed to accommodate the prejudices and enhance the self-image of the upper middle class, so efficiently codified.”¹¹

The Desire of the Museum

The Desire of the Museum was an exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art organized by fellows in the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program. The fellows included Timothy Landers, Jackie McAllister, Catsou Roberts, Benjamin Weil, and Marek Wieczorek. “The Desire of the Museum” was a “‘psychoanalysis’ of the museum,”¹² and included artworks by: Mark Dion, Marcel Duchamp, Andrea Fraser, the Guerilla Girls, Hans Haacke, Joseph Kosuth, Louise Lawler, Allan McCollum, and

⁶Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica: Lapis Press, 1986), 14.

⁷ O’Doherty, 39, 41.

⁸O’Doherty, 64.

⁹O’Doherty, 79.

¹⁰“As a modernism gets older, context becomes content. In a peculiar reversal, the object introduced into the gallery “frames” the gallery and its laws.” O’Doherty, 15.

¹¹O’Doherty, 76.

¹²Whitney Museum of American Art. *The Desire of the Museum* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1989), 2.

Ad Reinhardt. The fellows not only organized the exhibition, but wrote the introduction and critical essays in the exhibition catalogue as well. Roberts and Landers state unequivocally at the beginning of their introduction in the exhibition catalogue, “the museum of art is devoted to the collection, preservation, interpretation, and exhibition of objects whose value and status as art it largely determines.”¹³ They go on to argue that the museum serves not only the needs of public, but the wants and desires of special interest groups as well. The exhibition, “The Desire of the Museum,” anthropomorphosizes the museum by saying that it has its own desires separate from the viewer.¹⁴ Roberts and Landers assert that the “museum-goer must also be asked, “What do *you* want from the museum?’ For it is the play of desires between the viewer and the museum which determines the institutional experience of art.”¹⁵ The essays, “Paradox and Perversion,” “The Unconscious of the Museum,” “Sublimating the Viewer,” and “The Museum Under Analysis,” explore the desires that induce the collecting, displaying, and preserving of objects in museums.¹⁶

¹³Whitney Museum of American Art, 1.

¹⁴Whitney Museum of American Art, 2.

¹⁵Whitney Museum of American Art, 2.

¹⁶Whitney Museum of American Art, 2.

Kynaston McShine, The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect

The Museum as Muse: Artist Reflect is an exhibition catalogue published by The Museum of Modern Art in 1999. The introduction was written by the director of the exhibition, Kynaston McShine,¹⁷ a Senior Curator of Painting of Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art. Critical essays or an artist statement accompany some of the artwork included in the exhibition. Not all work included in the exhibition is institutional critique per se, but every work uses the museum as either inspiration, medium, or subject matter. McShine sees similarities between contemporary artist Mark Dion and eighteenth and nineteenth century artist and museum proprietor, Charles Willson Peale.¹⁸ Writing on artworks exploring the behind-the-scenes of museums like the artwork of Louise Lawler, McShine says, “What is not on display in the Museum is as crucial to it as what is: the large collections not on view, the library, the loaned works arriving for an exhibition and leaving after it, the works being deaccessioned, the files on artists and on specific objects, the collective memory of the staff ...”¹⁹ The book also includes “Artists on Museums: An Anthology,” a collection of excerpts in which artists express their feelings towards museums. Particularly illuminating is Hans Haacke’s reprinted essay, “Museums, Managers of Consciousness,” first published in the February 1984 issue of *Art in America*. He states, “an institution’s intellectual and moral position becomes

¹⁷Kynaston McShine was the reason the art activists and institutional critique artists, the Guerrilla Girls, first came together. “In 1984, MoMA curator Kynaston MacShine opened a show called “An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture.” Out of 169 artists, he chose only 13 women and then told the press any artist who wasn’t in the show should rethink “his” career. That made a bunch of us really mad and we started making posters to expose racism and sexism in the artworld.” Guerrilla Girls, *The Guerrilla Girls’ Art Museum Activity Book*, (New York: Printed Matter, Inc., 2004), 5.

¹⁸McShine, 15-16.

¹⁹McShine, 16.

tenuous only if it claims to be free of ideological bias. And such an institution should be challenged if it refuses to acknowledge that it operates under constraints deriving from its sources of funding and from the authority to which it reports.”²⁰ Haacke feels that most museums in general cannot claim to be free of ideology thus most of his work deals with illuminating the shady motives behind museum acquisitions, governance, and sponsorship.

James Putnam, Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium

One of the most comprehensive catalogues on artwork inspired by museums is James Putnam’s *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium* from 2001. Putnam is curator of the Contemporary Arts & Culture Program at the British Museum, and as such, he states that he approaches the subject as a curator rather than theorist. Putnam’s book is an examination of the discourse between contemporary artists and the museum. Putnam felt that the literature was lacking a publication that covered the diverse artworks influenced by the museum extensively.²¹ He writes, “Some of these contemporary art projects are not widely known in art circles, and are published here for the first time.”²² Chapters include: “The Museum Effect,” “Art or Artifact,” “Public Inquiry,” “Framing the Frame,” “Curator/ Creator,” and “On the Inside.” Putnam notes that some artists and artworks fit into more than one category explored in each chapter. “The Museum Effect” looks at artwork dealing with the displaying and storage of museum objects. Sizes of collection, vessels of display, and shipping crates have all been used as means of artistic

²⁰qtd. in McShine, 235.

²¹Putnam, 7.

²²Putnam, 7.

reinterpretation. “Art or Artifacts” examines artwork made from artists collecting and sometimes changing objects into their own museum-like collections. “Public Inquiry” deals with artworks that challenge the established norms of the institution. The artists and artworks included in this section are among the most recognized examples of institutional critique. “Framing the Frame” looks at photography within the museum space. Some photographs show the intriguing juxtapositions of objects on display, some explore the relationship between objects and viewer, while other photographs show objects in storage. “Curator/ Creator” is devoted to looking at artists whose artistic practices are similar to that of a curator. Artists mentioned in this section include Joseph Kosuth and Fred Wilson. “On the Inside” looks at artists engaging in institutional critique artwork. Artists Daniel Buren, Sophie Calle, and Fred Wilson are explored.

Andrea Fraser, Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser

Andrea Fraser is an institutional critique performance artist, a historian of institutional critique artwork and a prolific writer on the subject. Fraser’s book, *Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser*, published in 2005, is a collection of her previously published articles and the text of some of her performance pieces including her famous “Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk” from which this book derives its name. Fraser considers her writings as part of her art.²³ One of the articles published in this collection, “In and Out of Place” is about Louise Lawler. It was first published in the June 1985 issue of *Art in America*. In one part of the article, Fraser examines the relationship of Lawler’s work in comparison to other institutional critique artists like

²³Andrea Fraser and Alexander Alberro, *Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser*, The MIT Press Writing Art series (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005), xxii.

Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, and Hans Haacke, and how Lawler's type of institutional critique differs from the others. Fraser explains that Lawler "...locates it [institutional power] in a systematized set of presentational procedures that name, situate, centralize".²⁴ At the end of her article, Fraser writes:

As long as artists continue to subscribe to traditional modes of production and places of functioning – whether or not they engage in critique, appropriation, or the uncovering of hidden agendas – aesthetic signification will continue to be locked in an order of institutionalized subjectivity and legitimizing consumption.²⁵

Fraser's critique is rather astute, and is one that still plagues institutional critique artwork twenty-three years after Fraser's article was first published. Perhaps Fraser sees her own form of artwork, her writing or her performance and multimedia art, as being different from "traditional modes of production and places of functioning."²⁶

Kirsi Peltomäki, Strategies of Institutional Critique in Recent American Art

Strategies of Institutional Critique in Recent American Art is the dissertation of Kirsi Peltomäki, a doctoral student in the program in Visual and Cultural Studies in the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Rochester. Written in 2001, Peltomäki examines the correlation between institutional critique artwork, the institution itself, and the viewers. Peltomäki's arguments and ideas are complex. She uses a "Focauldian mode of analysis" to examine institutional critique artwork from a unique point of view that has not been done previously.²⁷ Peltomäki writes, "... I also stress

²⁴Fraser and Alberro, 20.

²⁵Fraser and Alberro, 27.

²⁶Fraser and Alberro, 27.

²⁷Peltomäki, 20.

factors ... such as the figure of the artist and the role of discursive structures such as museums, galleries, art criticism, and the art market.”²⁸ She provides particular insight and background history on Fred Wilson’s *Mining the Museum* (1994), and Michael Asher’s *Untitled* (1999) and *The Michael Asher Lobby* (1983-84). Her first chapter uses the artwork of Asher, Buren, and Haacke to explore the institutional critique of the 1970s. Her second chapter examines the figure of the artist using the works of Lawler and Fraser. Using works by Fraser, Asher, Gerald McMaster, and Wilson, Peltomäki explores the role of the museum as a place in institutional critique artwork in her third chapter. In chapter four, Peltomäki focuses on works by Asher, Fraser, Calle, and the Museum of Jurassic Technology, to show the interplay between the audience and the artist. Chapter five continues to question the involvement of the audience and its relation to works by Allan Kaprow, Julia Scher, Rirkrit Tiravniya, and McMaster.²⁹ Peltomäki writes, “...the whole question of the museum in contemporary art has come to be viewed by many through the lens of institutional critique.”³⁰ Peltomäki points out that canon of art history has relegated the institutional critique art movement to lower case letters while it elevated others movements like Minimalism and Conceptual art with capitalization. In addition, practitioners and critics have found it unnecessary to unequivocally define institutional critique.³¹

²⁸Peltomäki, 20.

²⁹Peltomäki, 23-26.

³⁰Peltomäki 1.

³¹Peltomäki, 3.

“Constructing the Spectacle of Culture in Museums” by Ivan Karp and Fred Wilson

The chapter “Constructing the Spectacle of Culture in Museums” by Ivan Karp and Fred Wilson is based on a lecture series “Art in context: rethinking the New World,” sponsored in the Fall of 1992 by the Atlanta College of Art and Gallery and Continuing Education Department. It was originally published in the May-June 1993 issue of *Artpapers*, and then included in the book *Thinking About Exhibitions* in 1996.³² Fred Wilson explains in the first half of the article the history of his own art, and how having worked in museums led him to use museums for the subject matter of his own work. Wilson explains, “As an artist who had work on the walls and also looked at work, I had questions about what those spaces were really doing to the artwork and to artists.”³³ He also states that the choices he made in selecting and displaying certain artworks. He says, “to my mind, how things are displayed in galleries and museums makes a huge difference in how one sees the world.”³⁴ Wilson explains that his own work is that of an artist making art and not a curator creating an exhibition. In his section of the article, Ivan Karp quotes Hans Haacke, who wrote, “every museum is perforce a political institution, no matter whether it is privately run.” This is an important concept to understand because Karp believes, “the conventions by which we understand objects and otherness are conventions produced, at least in part, by museums.”³⁵ Subsequently, the views perpetuated at museums are influenced by the political ideology of the society within

³²Ivan Karp and Fred Wilson, “Constructing the Spectacle of Culture in Museums,” in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (London: Routledge, 1996), 267.

³³Karp and Wilson, 252.

³⁴Karp and Wilson, 256.

³⁵Karp and Wilson, 262.

which it exists. Karp states, “museums become sites where one not only asserts things but where there is also the possibility of questioning those very assumptions.”³⁶

Institutional Critique and After

The Southern Californian Consortium of Art Schools held a symposium “Institutional Critique and After” at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in May 2006, which led to a publication of book of the same name as the symposium. The book addresses the issues raised and examined at the symposium by three different panels of artists, art historians, and museum professionals. The book includes a short essay by Hans Haacke, “All the Art That’s Fit to Show”, originally an untitled catalogue statement from a 1974 exhibition and previously published in *Museum by Artists*. In the essay Haacke declares, “by the very structure of its [the museum’s] existence, it is a political institution.”³⁷ Andrea Fraser has two articles included in the book, “The Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique” and “What is Institutional Critique”. Also of note is the article, “The Curatorialization [sic] of Institutional Critique” by Jens Hoffmann. In addition, excerpts from *The Guerilla Girls’ Art Museum Activity Book* are included.

“The University Museum and Gallery: A site for Institutional Critique and a focus for the Curriculum” by Lydia King and Janet Marstine

In Lydia King’s and Janet Marstine’s chapter, “The University Museum and Gallery: A site for Institutional Critique and a focus for the Curriculum” from the book *New Museum Theory: An Introduction* published in 2006, they explore the history of

³⁶Karp and Wilson, 267.

³⁷Southern California Consortium of Arts Symposia and Welchman, 53.

institutional critique artwork and how it corresponds with University Galleries and Museums. They write:

Because art museums are the most common kind on university campuses, they are the sites most likely to be involved in institutional critique. University Galleries promote self critique by commissioning artists who make the museum the subject of their work to create projects with students and faculty from across the curriculum.³⁸

Two case studies of university museums and galleries, the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota and the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Gallery at Skidmore College, are explored to provide further insight. The Weisman Art Museum brought in artist Mark Dion to work with their collections and students to produce a site-specific artwork. Dion is often interested in the *Wunderkammer*, or cabinet of curiosity, as his means of artistic expression. Cabinets of curiosities, containing an odd assortment of the fantastical in its collections, were how museums originally started. Dion spent three semesters working with the museum and students, and the final product was called *Cabinets of Curiosities*.

Findings

Many of the same artists are mentioned time after time in the aforementioned literature. While much has been written on institutional critique artwork, it has been yet to be used as a framework in examining problems facing museums.

³⁸King and Marstine, 268.

CHAPTER FOUR

Institutional Critique Illustrating Problems in Museums

Institutional critique artwork can serve as tool to understand better potential problems facing museums today. In this chapter, I argue that institutional critique artwork literally serves as an illustration to highlight problems with: collections, boards of trustees, corporate sponsorship, museum architecture, and education/ visitor experiences.

Areas of Problems

Collections

Collections are what make museums unique from other nonprofit, educational institutions. Many problems in museums arise in the collecting and displaying of objects. This section explores artists who use their artwork to examine and illustrate problems relating to a museum's collection to the public.

Deaccessions. Deaccessioning is the proper and legal way for a museum to remove an object from its collection. Genoways and Ireland write in their book, *Museum Administration*, "If not handled properly, deaccessioning can endanger the museum's reputation and public trust."¹ Both L.A. Angelmaker and Michael Asher have created artworks that explore the deaccessioning of artworks. Angelmaker's *Bad Penny: For Museum Purchase Only*, from 1996, is one part of an installation at the Momenta Gallery,

¹Hugh H. Genoways and Lynne M. Ireland, *Museum Administration: An Introduction*, American Association for State and Local book series (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2003), 191.

in Brooklyn New York. It is an altered auction catalog from Christie's within a Plexiglas case. The pages of the auction catalog have been cut down to reveal a photograph of the artwork being sold. Angelmaker's work is highlighting the fact that while some works of art are deaccessioned by museums, and sold at auction; they somehow make it back in a museum's collection.² Jennifer Dalton writing on the installation explains, "De-accessioning [sic], a rather hot topic in the art world, is frowned upon because it removes objects from the public view."³ The title of Angelmaker's artwork comes from the idiom "a bad penny always turns up."⁴ The phrase suggests that you can never actually get rid of something because it will always come back to haunt you.⁵ Though not an art museum, one of the criteria for deaccessioning an object at the Sioux City Public Museum is if the object has been "accidentally" accessioned twice.⁶ Thereby trying to eliminate the object before it becomes a "bad penny."

Like Angelmaker, Michael Asher's artwork, *Untitled* from 1999 for the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition, *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect*, deals with deaccessioned artwork. Asher writes in the exhibition catalogue:

The construction of the museum collection suggests at least two histories, the museum wants to tell to the viewer and the history of the selection. The history of the selection includes, in addition to new acquisitions, the removal of works to sharpen the collection. My project for the exhibition the *The Museum as Muse: Artists reflect* [sic] is a printed inventory of all the paintings and sculptures that

²Putnam, 96.

³Dalton.

⁴ESC [pseud.], comment on "Bad Penny," The Phrase Finder, entry posted May 11, 2001. http://www.phrases.org.uk/bulletin_board/4/messages/1231.html (accessed October 29, 2008).

⁵E. D. Hirsch Jr., Joseph F. Kett, and James Trefil eds., "A bad penny always turns up," in *The New Edition of Cultural Legacy*, 3rd ed. (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), <http://www.bartleby.com/59/3/badpennyalwa.html> (accessed October 29, 2008).

⁶Genoways and Ireland, 192.

have been deaccessioned, and thereby subtracted, from the permanent holdings since the founding of The Museum of Modern Art.⁷

When an item is deaccessioned from a museum, the museum is saying that the item no longer has value.⁸ In regards to art, this can be very subjective. Asher's artwork literally exposes the potentially questionable removal of objects from the Museum of Modern Art's collections, and show the public which artwork the museum had deemed as no longer worthy of being in their collection. In the catalog produced by the museum per Asher's request, the museum inserted a note from one of their chief curators describing the museum's deaccession policy. This might have been an attempt by the museum to thwart any outcries from the public regarding some of the deaccessions the museum made.⁹ Through art, Angelmaker and Asher are able show the problems museum's can face when deaccessioning.

What is art? Similar to Asher's artwork, both Ad Reinhardt and Alan McCollum have artwork that examines how a museum can transform an object into art. Reinhardt's *How Modern is the Museum of Modern Art?* from 1940 is an ad style flyer for the American Abstract Artists. Like its title, the flyer asks questions such as "What does 'modern' mean?", "Is the museum a business?", and "What is this – a three ring circus?".¹⁰ The ad is specifically questioning the practices of the Museum of Modern

⁷McShine, 156.

⁸Patty Gerstenblith notes that there are a variety reasons for an item to be deaccessioned from a museum's collections including there might be a better example, it doesn't fit in with the rest of the collection, tastes change, and raising funds for the museum. Sharon Macdonald, *A Companion to Museum Studies*, Blackwell companions in cultural studies, 12, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 446.

⁹Peltomäki, 154-157.

¹⁰McShine, 209.

Art, almost sixty years before Asher does. The artists are using the flyer as means of exposing the fact that museums have the power of shaping the culture in their society. If a museum thinks an artist's work is worth collecting it becomes doctrine. However, there is nothing to stop the museum's decisions from being biased and self-serving, and Reinhardt's work serves to let the public know. McCollum's artwork also examines when an object becomes art how museum and gallery spaces affect this. His *Plaster Surrogates* from 1982-84 and *Plaster Surrogates* from 1982-89 are two similar installations of multitudes plaster objects painted to appear as gray framed, white matted, black rectangles displayed on a white gallery walls.¹¹ McCollum writes, "I wanted to create a homogenous view of their functioning, a kind of generic, portable art object for the wall."¹² In a way, McCollum's work becomes art when it is hung on a gallery wall. The black framed voids have meaning in the "white cube" of the museum. Daniel Buren explores this phenomenon and writes, "Placing/ Exhibiting a bit of bread in a Museum will no way change the function of the aforementioned Museum, but the latter will change the bit of bread to a work of art, at least for the duration of its exhibition."¹³ Artist Mark Dion agrees with Buren and states, "the development of the great museums established the convention for the public display of art: art is what you display in the Museum of Fine Art."¹⁴ Both Reinhardt and McCollum use their art to question the elevation of an object to art once it is place inside a museum or gallery.

¹¹Fraser and Alberro, 29-30.

¹²McShine, 144.

¹³Bronson and Gale, 70.

¹⁴Dion, 20.

Value of art. Most museums do not like to publicize the monetary value of objects in their collections because the collections should never be seen only as a financial asset. However, in the art world sales at major auction houses make it easy to compare the monetary value of artworks. Art has also become an investment, and might be bought for its monetary rather artistic value. Both Rose Finn-Kelcey and Hans Haacke explore this issue. Finn-Kelcey's, *Bureau De Change*, from 1988 is mosaic version of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* that examines the monetary value of art. It is made out of gold, silver, and copper colored coins emphasizing its pecuniary value. The piece is displayed on a gallery floor with a small platform next to it allowing visitors to look at it from above. Also next to the piece is a person sitting in a chair in the guise of a museum guard to protect the very expensive piece of art.¹⁵ Genoways and Ireland advise, "It is, therefore, essential to clearly define the duties of the security force and the priority for security of the collections, staff, and visitors."¹⁶ Thus, Finn-Kelcey shows that an artwork's value has been transformed from an aesthetic one to a monetary one. Hans Haacke's *Seurat's "Les Poseuses" (Small Version), 1888-1975* from 1975 traces the ownership of a pointillist painting by Georges Seurat of three nudes in front of his most famous painting, *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte - 1884*. Haacke produced a series of fourteen panels reproducing the Seurat painting at the top and below it providing information on each of the owners. While the artwork was never part of an illicit transaction, its ownership is illuminating. What Haacke's artwork reveals is the shift of art owned by the upper classes to art being owned by investment

¹⁵Putnam, 91.

¹⁶Genoways and Ireland, 212.

groups.¹⁷ Jackie McAllister and Benjamin Weil write, “The evidence of the painting’s journey from the artist’s studio to the portfolio of an investment consortium contradicts the notion of the work of art as a creation untainted by commercial concerns.”¹⁸ The artwork is not just art but a commodity.¹⁹ Problems arise when objects in a museum are regarded for their financial value rather than their artistic, historic, or scientific value.

Conditional gifts. Problems can also arise when accepting donations to a museum’s collections. Sophie Calle has artwork examining the dictates of donors. Calle’s artwork deals with conditional gifts. In the sub-section, “What to collect (and what not to collect)” of G. Ellis Burcaw’s *Introduction to Museum Work*, it states, “Do not accept conditional gifts. Donors may request that their gifts of a number of objects be place on exhibit, be exhibited intact -- without separating the objects – and that their names be prominently displayed with objects.”²⁰ Calle’s *Last Seen...* from 1991 is site-specific work for the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Her work addresses each of the artworks infamously stolen from the museum in 1990. Isabella Stewart Gardner’s will dictated that the rooms in the museum should remain as she had arranged them, thus the museum was required after the works of art were stolen to leave their locations empty. Calle uses this fact as part of her art. Each stolen piece is addressed with a framed photo of its location in the museum and then a framed piece with text from the staff about their thoughts on the stolen piece. The framed text piece is the same dimensions of the stolen

¹⁷Timothy W. Luke, *Shows of Force: Power, Politics, and Ideology in Art Exhibitions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 161-162. McShine, 154.

¹⁸Whitney Museum of American Art, 11.

¹⁹Whitney Museum of American Art, 11.

²⁰Burcaw, 58-59.

artwork it is addressing.²¹ One of the problems with conditional gifts is that they do not have allowances for unexpected problems. Thus, the Isabella Stewart Garner Museum is stuck with a very visible reminder of the crime that was perpetuated there.

Provenance. Museum's need to be sure they know the provenance of the objects in their collections, and Genoways and Ireland write, "Before accepting objects, the museum needs to study the question of 'title,' or ownership, and to avoid stolen objects..."²² Hans Haacke's "*Manet Projekt 74* 1974 exposed the links between museum patrons, trustees, politics, and business."²³ The piece is similar to his piece on Seurat. Haacke traces the provenance of a Manet painting, *Bunch of Asparagus*, from its production to its location in the Wallraf-Richartz Museum's collection on ten text panels. Haacke had been invited by the museum to participate in an exhibition celebrating its 150th anniversary. The museum had only purchased the Manet six years prior. However, the museum objected to panels about Hermann J. Abs. Abs was the financier who helped the museum purchase the Manet painting.²⁴ While the museum obtained *Bunch of Asparagus* by legal means, Haacke's work exposed information all in the public domain that showed questionable connections between Abs, chairman of the museum's

²¹Putnam, 106.

²²Genoways and Ireland, 177.

²³Bishop, 32.

²⁴Brian Hand, "Public Misrecognition," *Circa Art Magazine*, Circa 91 (Spring 2000), <http://www.recirca.com/backissues/c91/hand.shtml> (accessed October 29, 2008).

purchasing committee and chairman of the Deutsche Bank, and the Third Reich.²⁵ The six previous owners of the painting were Jewish collectors, but Abs was banker during the Nazi regime, and briefly imprisoned for his connections.²⁶ Having an artwork associated with Nazis is not the public image a museum wants or courts. Sabeth Buchman elaborates on Haacke's work, "The work was not solely an uncovering or a lament for victims of fascism, but a dilemma for the audience as viewers and as subjects with forgotten memories in the neutralizing context of the museum."²⁷ As much as a museum might want to forget the associations of an artwork, it is not always possible. Thus, it is important to understand the provenance of an object before the museum accepts it into their collection.²⁸

Diversity. Both the Guerilla Girls and Fred Wilson have used their artistic practices to highlight the male anglo-centric viewpoint and lack of diversity expressed in museums. "Museums will strive to identify actions that reveal all discriminatory behavior..."²⁹ The Guerilla Girls' *How Many Women Had One-Person Exhibitions at NYC Museums Last Year?* is a black and white ad from 1985. The Guggenheim, Metropolitan, and Whitney are listed at zero one-woman art exhibitions at their

²⁵Sabeth Buchmann, "Signs of Abundance," http://www.christianphilippmueller.net/e/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=55&Itemid=50 (accessed October 29, 2008).

²⁶Hand.

²⁷Buchmann.

²⁸Haacke's artwork was ultimately rejected by the museum. To protest this censorship, artist Daniel Buren pasted copies of Haacke's panels on top of his own work. The museum responded to this by placing white sheets over the copies of Haacke's panels to which the public responded by ripping off. Hand.

²⁹Genoways and Ireland, 228.

institutions the previous year. The Modern is listed as having one.³⁰ Their *It's Even Worse in Europe* from 1985 is a white ad with black text the same as the title of the work. The Guerilla Girls are literally stating that the situation from female and non-white artists might appear bleak in United States, but it is even bleaker in Europe.³¹ Wilson's artwork often addresses the colonialism and racism found in all types of museums. His installation, *The Museum: Mixed Metaphors* from 1993 at the Seattle Art Museum, included a display of traditional African garments. Amongst the traditional garments is a man's gray suit. The text accompanying the suit says, "Certain elements of dress were used to designate one's rank in Africa's status-conscious capitals. A grey suit with conservatively patterned tie denotes a businessman or member of the government. Costumes such as this are designed and tailored in Africa and worn throughout the continent."³² Wilson uses the man's gray suit as a way of mocking how museums depict Africans. Museums do not display professional clothes, when they exhibit African garments. Writing on the affect colonialism has had on museum, Genoways and Ireland explain, "Many cultures being studied were seen as inferior, less cultivated, and less significant because the people from those cultures had attitudes, values, and beliefs that did not adhere to Western beliefs."³³ Museums show traditional garments that reinforce the stereotype of the African inhabitants being "primitive."

³⁰McShine, 219.

³¹McShine 226.

³²Putnam, 135.

³³Genoways and Ireland, 320.

Humans on display. On a similar theme, some artists are addressing how American museums display Native Americans remains and artifacts. Subsequently, displaying living people as museum objects has become a new tool for critique. James Luna's *The Artifact Piece* from 1986 was first performed at the San Diego Museum of Man. The artwork is comprised of the artist, himself, on exhibit in a sand filled vitrine.³⁴ Museums used to collect Native American artifacts in dubious and unethical ways. Luna's performance piece references the sad fact that live Native Americans had been exhibited in museums. Majorie Schwarzer states in her book, *Riches, Rivals, & Radicals: 100 years of Museums in America* that Admiral Robert E. Peary donated in 1897 barrels of human bones and six live Eskimos to the American Museum of Natural History. The donated people actually lived in the museum's basement as though they were truly part of the museum's collection. Four of the Eskimos died of illnesses. The museum actually displayed the skeleton of one of the men in an exhibit even though the man's young son was still alive and in their care. Another story of a museum displaying a live Native American is the story of Ishi. Ishi actually lived in the basement of the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum, and worked there as a janitor. Ishi himself was an attraction to visitors at the museum and provided demonstrations. While this might have provided invaluable data about his tribe, it was very reminiscent of P.T Barnum's shows that exploited a person's differences to make money. Luna's artwork serves as a reminder of a sad history in American museums.³⁵

³⁴Doss, 245.

³⁵Schwarzer, 88-89.

Other artists dealing with displaying humans are Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Coco Fusco, Peter Greenway, and Cornelia Parker and Tilda Swinton. Pena and Fusco's *The Year of the White Bear: Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* from 1992 was a performance piece performed at the National Museum of American History, The Field Museum, and the Whitney Biennial.³⁶ Similar to Luna's art, Pena and Fusco's art explored the displaying of "natives." Greenway acted as a guest curator at Boymans van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam. His work, *The Physical Self*, from 1991 included both nude models posed in vitrines and sculptures of the human body in vitrines;³⁷ Putnam writes "the effect of placing something in a vitrine is to 'museumize' it: the glass creates not just a physical barrier but establishes an 'official distance' between object and viewer."³⁸ Parker and Swinton's *The Maybe* was part display and part performance piece. Performed at the Serpentine Gallery in 1995, Swinton lay on mattress in a vitrine a pretended to be asleep for eight hours a day during the first week of the exhibition.³⁹ The exhibit also contained items related to famous historical persons. Such items on display included Queen Victoria's stocking, Charles Dickens' quill, and the brain of Charles Babbage, inventor of the first computer.⁴⁰

Board of Trustees

As a non-profit institution a museum is governed by a Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees is responsible to set the mission and policies of the museum, and hire

³⁶Doss, 245.

³⁷Putnam, 32.

³⁸Putnam, 36.

³⁹Buck.

⁴⁰Putnam, 145-146.

the museum director. Since museums deal with issues of public trust, members of the board need to have no personal conflicts with their position on the board. In the book, *Museum Trusteeship*, Ullberg and Ullberg write, “conflicts of interest constitute an expanding area for possible criticism and embarrassment as well as for increasing potential liability for museum trustees.”⁴¹ Artworks by The Guerilla Girls and Hans Haacke show the personal conflicts, political agendas, and financial motivations of Board Members that can cause problems for their respective institutions.

The *Guerilla Girls’ Code of Ethics for Art Museums* from 1989 is an ad style piece with the title of the work in bold over two tablets with ten commandments, listing a code of ethics for art museums. Making a biblical reference, the Guerilla Girls are asserting that museums must adhere to a code of ethics and that such a code is as sacred as its biblical counterpart. In *The Guerilla Girl’s Art Museum Activity Book*, they point out that they had created and adopted a code of ethics four years before the American Association of Museums did. Two of the ten commandments deal with Trustees specifically. The first commandment states, “Thou shalt not be a Museum Trustee and also Chief Stockholder of a Major Auction House.” This commandment deals with an issue of personal conflict and profit as well as references an actual scenario. Museums, for the most part, are non-profit entities, and as such, no one person can make a profit from the institution. However, in the late 1980s the chief stockholder of Sotheby’s auction house, A. Alfred Taubman, was also on the Board of Trustees of the Whitney Museum of American Art. Taubman served on the Painting and Sculpture Committee, which provided him with inside information long in advance on the artists being

⁴¹Alan D. Ullberg and Patricia Ullberg, *Museum Trusteeship* (Washington: American Association of Museums, 1981).

showcased in future exhibitions at the museum.⁴² Ullberg and Ullberg state, “Exhibition of certain objects by a museum can increase their value substantially.”⁴³ Thus, Taubman had the potential to acquire the artwork of an artist before an exhibition at the Whitney became public knowledge, and then make more money by selling the artwork after the exhibition. Ullberg and Ullberg also write, “Board Members have ethical and legal obligations to refrain from utilizing proprietary information for their personal gain or that of close associates.”⁴⁴

The fourth commandment states, “Thou shall not limit thy Board of Trustees to Corporate Officers, Wealthy Entrepreneurs and Social Hangers-On. At least 2% must be Artists representing the racial and gender percentages of the U.S. population”. This commandment deals with the lack of diversity found on many museum boards.

In Hans Haacke’s *MOMA POLL* from 1970, the question “Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon’s Indochina⁴⁵ policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?” was written on a wall of the museum above two, “yes” and “no” acrylic boxes with electronic counters to record the votes. Nelson Rockefeller, who was then the Republican governor of New York, had been both the President and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art, and other family members of his had connections with the museum as well. Haacke believes that all museums are political institutions whether they appear to be or not. Through his

⁴²Guerilla Girls, 6.

⁴³Ullberg and Ullberg.

⁴⁴Ullberg and Ullberg, 83.

⁴⁵The “The Indochina” policy was referring to Vietnam. Putnam, 28.

poll, Haacke exposes the political connections of a museum via its board, and that a museum can be a tool of political machinations.⁴⁶

Hans Haacke's infamous *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System as of May 1, 1971* exposes through photos, maps, and written data that the wealth of a New Yorker came in part from being a "slumlord." The Guggenheim's director responded to this harsh criticism by canceling Haacke's showing at the museum and firing the curator responsible for it. While the Guggenheim had nothing to do with the properties detailed in Haacke's work, the "slumlord" in question was thought to have ties to the museum's board of directors. It has been often erroneously reported that Shapolsky was a board member of the Guggenheim. This alleged relationship between the "slumlord" and the museum hurt the museum's reputation when the public learned of the cancelling of Haacke's show. Critics wondered why the museum would cancel the show if he did not have friends on the Guggenheim Board. Art museums have often faced the problems as appearing elitist and not being for the common person, and the fact that New Yorker with alleged ties to museum's board reached his socio-economic status on the "back" of the common person furthers this friction.⁴⁷

In the *Solomon R. Guggenheim Board of Trustees* (1974), Haacke explores the Guggenheim Board by documenting the corporate affiliation of Board members and the Guggenheim family. His work revealed that a Guggenheim family member and two trustees of the museum were board members of the Kennecott Cooper Company, a

⁴⁶Luke, 154. Putnam, 28-29.

⁴⁷Luke, 155.

company operating in Chile and harshly criticized by the then President Salvador Allende.⁴⁸ By doing, such Haacke is showing that museum boards might appear to be conflict-free or not have a personal agenda, but some have questionable associations.

Corporate Sponsorship/ Affiliations

The conflict of interests between Board Members with affiliations to corporations leads itself to the greater problem. Genoways and Ireland write, “Museums will strive to conduct their business and programs in a legal and moral fashion and will strive to avoid even the appearance of impropriety.”⁴⁹ Michael Asher, the Guerilla Girls, and Hans Haacke each explore how patron and corporate affiliation can affect museums.

Asher’s *The Michael Asher Lobby* from 1983-84 is a red place card with white typeface announcing that the Lobby is named after Michael Asher. The piece is making fun of the museum practices to name parts of their museum after wealthy patrons.⁵⁰ Putnam writes, “By using his own name, Asher was indirectly claiming the public site as a space for artistic reflection...”⁵¹ The Guerilla Girls’ *What’s Fashionable, Prestigious, and Tax-Deductible?* from 1987 is black and white ad that shows which corporations sponsored exhibitions and how men and whites were represented in the exhibition. The

⁴⁸Blake Stimson and Gregory Shoelette, *Collectivism After Modernism: The Art of Social Imaginations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 186.
http://books.google.com/books?id=2eAgYuBbM9YC&pg=PA186&lpg=PA186&dq=HAACKE+GUGGENHEIM+BOARD+OF+TRUSTEES&source=bl&ots=YeUc5onUZj&sig=kcWDO5ekIPviMIVDr4sxtZI1QD8&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=9&ct=result (accessed November 7, 2007).

⁴⁹Genoways and Ireland, 228.

⁵⁰Putnam, 95.

⁵¹Putnam, 95.

answer to the question in the title of the work is, “discriminating against women & non-white artists.”⁵²

Hans Haacke’s *Cowboy with Cigarette* from 1990 is cubist collage and drawing that comments on Phillips Morris’ corporate sponsorship of an exhibition of the most famous cubist practitioner, Picasso. One of Phillip Morris’ slogans was, “It takes art to make a company great.”⁵³ Haacke believes that corporate sponsorship has stopped museum from exhibiting critical issues for fear of making their sponsors unhappy.

Hans Haacke’s *Metromobiltan* from 1985 attacks Mobil’s support of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s “Treasures of Ancient Nigeria.” Two hanging canvas text panels surround an image of Nigerian art with the title of the exhibition at the top, and “Supported by a grant from Mobil” at the bottom. The canvas text panel on the left reads, “Mobil’s management in New York believes that its South African subsidiaries’ sales to the police and military are but a small part of the total sales...Mobil.”⁵⁴ The canvas text panel on the right reads, “Total denial of supplies to the police and military forces of a host country is hardly consistent with an image of responsible citizenship in that country.”⁵⁵ Two pictures from the funeral of black victims of the South African police are between the text panels and the image of the Nigerian art.⁵⁶ Luke explains Haacke’s problem with Mobil’s patronage of African art, “While it extends its art patronage to ancient Nigeria, then, Mobil sells the fuel that South Africa uses to run its

⁵²McShine, 232.

⁵³McShine, 154.

⁵⁴Putnam, 108.

⁵⁵Putnam, 108.

⁵⁶Putnam, 108.

cops out into the Crossroads or Soweto to shoot blacks. Both are done in the name of responsible citizenship everywhere Mobil operates.”⁵⁷ Mobil’s interests in Africa appear to be conflicted. On the one hand, they want to be seen supporting African art and on the other hand, they supply people who suppress the rights of black South Africans.

Genoways and Ireland write, “The museum must remember that as the corporation benefits from the museum’s reputation, so the reputation of the corporation, for good or bad, will reflect on the museum.”⁵⁸ As Asher, the Guerilla Girls, and Haacke show through their artwork that partnering with patrons and corporations can have financial benefits for a museum, but also have unexpected ramifications.

Museum Architecture

Museum architecture has evolved from buildings that look like palaces to buildings that are works of art themselves. With the rise of “starchitects,” the museum building has sometimes become more famous than the collection it houses. Since it is a museum’s collection and not its architecture that defines a museum, this can be problematic. Daniel Buren, Christo, and Richard Hamilton each explore the museum building as art.

Daniel Buren’s *Une enveloppe peut en cache rune autre* from 1989 is a site-specific work at the Musee Rath in Geneva. The outside of the neo-classical Museum building is partial obscured by Buren’s signature white and colored stripes.⁵⁹ James Putnam states, “[Buren] was thus reversing the traditional situation of the edifice acting

⁵⁷Luke, 163.

⁵⁸Genoways and Ireland, 285.

⁵⁹Pacquement. Putnam, 161.

as the container for artwork, so challenging and extending the physical confines of the institutional framework.”⁶⁰ Buren’s artwork transforms the museum building into a giant artwork, and critiques the fact that sometimes it is the museum building that is more famous than its collections.

Christo’s *The Museum of Modern Art Wrapped: Project for New York* from 1971 is a proposed project that never came to fruition. The proposed artwork shows the MoMA completely wrapped in canvas and rope, standing out against the New York City scene. James Trainor writes, “ironic in its inversion of the traditional relationship between the museum and art object, the project served to destabilize the familiar dichotomy of the container and the thing contained.”⁶¹ Like Buren, Christo transforms the museum building into artwork, and is a comment on the trend of memorable museum architecture. Kynaston McShine writes, “rather than the museum containing the art, the art contains the museum.”⁶² One of the most famous examples of museum architecture is Frank Lloyd Wright’s Guggenheim Museum, and it is often considered a work of art. Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani states, “It is not the art, but the architecture that is the real attraction here. And the architecture is not behaving subserviently, but acting as the protagonist.”⁶³ Richard Hamilton literally makes it into art in his four reliefs, *The Solomon R Guggenheim (Black and White)*, *(Black)*, *(Gold)*, and *(Spectrum)* from 1965-66.⁶⁴ McShine writes, “Richard Hamilton’s fiberglass molds...divorce us from the

⁶⁰Putnam, 161.

⁶¹McShine, 124.

⁶²McShine, 19.

⁶³Macdonald, 248.

⁶⁴McShine, 110-111.

institution and its contents and reduce it to a decorative object.”⁶⁵ Lampugnani writes, “The museum as an institution thus challenges the architect to produce an advertisement for it using easily remembered images – even if these images compete with, or even contradict, these contained in the collection.”⁶⁶ Buren, Christo, and Hamilton each seek to critique the trend in which the vessel containing a museum’s collection is more important than the collection itself.

Education/ Visitors Experience

Today education and the visitors’ experience are important components in museums. Genoways and Ireland write, “the education function is what gives the collection meaning.”⁶⁷ Andrea Fraser, Janet Cardiff, and Vito Acconci are artists who tackle this function of the museum in their institutional artwork. Fraser acted as the fictitious docent, Jane Castleton, in *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* performed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1989. Fraser would talk about things that are normally not part of a museum’s guided tour including the bathrooms and cloakroom in the guise that they were areas for interpretation just like the objects on display. One photograph of the tour shows her gesturing to a water fountain.⁶⁸ Putnam describes Fraser’s performance as critiquing the elitist interpretations in art museums.⁶⁹ Fraser achieves this by lampooning stereotypical docent tours. Many museums rely on docents to provide the

⁶⁵McShine, 19.

⁶⁶Macdonald, 249.

⁶⁷Genoways and Ireland, 274.

⁶⁸Putnam, 98.

⁶⁹Putnam, 111.

educational aspect of the museum, but dealing with volunteers can be problematic.

Genoways and Ireland state, “a thorough training program should be implemented for all volunteers, especially those who will be interacting with the public.”⁷⁰ Fraser states, “The training [museum guides] receive from the museum professional is usually limited to particular museum collections, and leaves the docent without the means to generate a legitimate opinion independently of the institution.”⁷¹ Thus, a docent tour reinforces the ideology of the institution.

Cardiff’s *Chiaroscuro* from 1997 is a site-specific audio tour that engages the viewer to look at the space and people in it in a different way.⁷² Cardiff takes what has generally been an education tool, the audio tour, and transforms it into an art piece. By making visitors a part of the art, Cardiff invites listener to question what exactly art is and if the visitor experience is part of the art. Acconci’s *Proximity Piece* from 1970 is performance piece at The Jewish Museum in which Acconci invaded other visitors’ personal space. Acconci would choose a supposedly random visitor and follow the visitor through the museum slowly getting closer and closer to the chosen visitor. Thus, the visitors experience becomes part of the artwork. Photographs from the performances are the only records of the piece.⁷³ Kate Linker writes, “The industrial parameter of the museum are thus destabilized by Acconci’s assault on one of its underlying premises – the individual observer – and the security of aesthetic perception is threatened by the

⁷⁰Genoways and Ireland, 277.

⁷¹McShine, 164.

⁷²McShine, 166.

pressure of social activity.”⁷⁴ Through their work, Cardiff and Acconci take the visitor experience from one of passive observance to active participation.

Conclusion

Institutional critique artwork is one tool that can help us to understand the problems facing museums today. In particular, institutional critique artwork can highlight problems museums have with collections, boards of trustees, corporate sponsorship, museum architecture, and education/ visitor experiences.

⁷³McShine, 170.

⁷⁴McShine, 170.

CHAPTER FIVE

My Critique of Institutional Critique Artwork

Though institutional critique artwork has stimulated much interest in museological issues, these critiques have often fallen short in a variety of ways. It is often unclear exactly how one defines such artwork; the artwork is often challenged by too close an association with the label “conceptual art.” It can often be misunderstood by the viewers, criticized for being repetitive in theme or style or for being too site specific. Moreover, the artists can be accused of expressing biased opinions, and that their work is too collections focused. The following explores these issues as well as examining the issues raised by institutional artwork from the museums perspective.

Kirsi Peltomäki argues in her dissertation, *Strategies of Institutional Critique in Recent American Art* that the term *institutional critique* is such an easily understood concept that people writing on the subject rarely feel the need to define it clearly.¹ However, this in itself leads to problems and confusion because institutional critique defines a broad range of artwork. If there is no standard definition of “institutional critique” then you could potentially label everything institutional critique. A more precise definition allows us to understand with more clarity what should and should not be institutional critique. Some might believe that institutional critique refers to only art museums. However, institutional critique extends beyond the art gallery and limiting to only art museums negates the significant work of Fred Wilson and James Luna. As a

¹Peltomäki, 2.

result of there being not standard definition of “institutional critique,” some artists might disagree or even object to their works being called “institutional critique.”

Another problem with institutional critique artwork is that it is often associated with Conceptual art, which is often not readily understood by the viewing public. Many see institutional critique as a subset of Conceptual art. Conceptual art is more about an “idea” than it is about the actual art “object,” which can lead to the viewer’s confusion because Conceptual artwork can be manifested in unusual forms and mediums. For example, Michael Asher’s *Untitled* from 1999 for the Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition, *The Museum as Muse*, is not your typical artwork, but rather a list of items. Viewers might have a hard time grasping how a catalog of a museum’s deaccessioned artwork constitutes as art, and what role the artist had in creating it. Asher’s artistic influence is seen in the idea behind artwork rather than in its physical creation. Another institutional critique artwork that has latent meaning that might not be initially understood is L.A. Angelmaker’s *Bad Penny: For Museum Purchase Only* from 1996 which includes an incised auction catalog encased in plexiglass. Angelmaker didn’t originally produce the auction catalog, but he transformed it into his own work through simple alterations to fit his notion.

Again, because Conceptual art is about the idea behind a work of art rather than the process or the art object itself, the viewing public might not even regard the works themselves as “art” due to their unusual manifestations. This could be because the viewing public does not understand the theories behind the art or because they do not understand the museum practices the work of art is referencing. Sabeth Buchmann writes on Hans Haacke’s artwork, “The critics’ response was often that this work was sociology

and not art.”² Performance pieces can be seen as being theatric rather than “high art.” Because institutional critique art is not easily understood by the public, it is not clear what audience institutional critique artists are targeting. Institutional critique artwork might have a better reception if it was more accessible to the everyday visitor, and not the small group of people who understand museum practices.

Another problem facing institutional critique artwork is that many of the practitioners stick to one theme or medium and by doing so dilute the meaning behind their artwork. For example, Allan McCollum’s *Plaster Surrogates* from 1982-84 and his *Plaster Surrogates* from 1982-89 are virtually the same. McCollum’s artwork gains no greater meaning and is no longer as resounding through duplication.³ The Guerilla Girls are known for their specific ad-style artwork and both *How Many Women Had One-Person Exhibitions at NYC Museums Last Year?* from 1985 and *It’s Even Worse in Europe* also from 1985 are representative of said style. Though the message is different in each of the Guerilla Girl’s artwork, they still relate to the overall theme of the unequal representation of women and people of color artists in art museums. Some of the Guerilla Girls’ artwork is more effective than others, but the repetition of the same theme lessens the individual impact of the artwork.

Numerous institutional critique artworks are site-specific. Such site-specification could lead the viewer to a narrow focus and not be able to interpret the broader implications. Sophie Calle’s *Last Seen...* from 1991 is a piece about stolen art at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and the implications of Isabella Stewart’s will.

²Hand.

³Eleanor Heartney, “Louise Lawler: Pictures from the exhibition,” *Art Press*, no 301 (May 2004), 41.

However, there is the broader context of restricted gifts to museums. Hans Haacke's *Solomon R. Guggenheim Board of Trustees* from 1974 focuses only on Guggenheim Trustees, but trustees at other museums might have dubious connections as well.

The relevance of some institutional critique artwork might change over time. In the 1970s, Hans Haacke's revealed of the dubious chain of ownership of a Manet painting; the owners included some controversial figures. Today, however, such a revelation would not be as surprising because the news has been filled with such stories. The Guerilla Girls' *Code of Ethics* mentions situations and conflicts of interests that are far less likely to happen today. While the artists partaking in institutional critique artwork are critiquing the museum, they are part of the institution and not separate from it. So their experience with the museum as an institution is biased. In an ironic twist, the museums that Guerilla Girls' complain about in their art now collect their artwork. Even the curator, Kynaston McShine that first enraged the Guerilla Girls into forming is still an influential presence in the institutional critique art scene. The catalog of exhibition *The Museum as Muse*, which he curated in 1999 at the Museum of Modern Art, includes the Guerilla Girls artwork interspersed throughout the section quoting artists on their thoughts about museums. Though the Guerilla Girls are included in the catalog it is located in back amongst excerpts and essays of artists' thoughts on museums and their artwork was not a part of McShine's exhibition.

Haacke's artwork on museum board of trustees is not without criticism. Many critics see Hans Haacke's *Solomon R. Guggenheim Board of Trustees* as his way of exacting revenge upon the Guggenheim for cancelling a planned show of his at the

Guggenheim.⁴ In Haacke's *MOMA POLL*, he shows that museums can be political institutions using Governor Rockefeller and his connection to the Museum of Modern Art as an example. Governor Rockefeller's mother was one of the founders of the museum, and therefore, his association with museum is logical. His connection can be viewed as personal rather than political. Sometimes a museum's connections with board members are not as simple as they appear, and it is often difficult for museums to disentangle themselves from such connections.

Collections are a primary focus of institutional artwork, and with other areas of focus being neglected as a result. However, it does make sense that collections are a primary focus of artists critiquing museums as it is the collection that makes museum unique. The critiques of museum education/ visitors experience are the least harsh of the critiques mentioned in this thesis. This is still a relatively unexplored area that institutional critique artists could find much to critique.

Art museums are the primary site of institutional critique artwork, but other types of museums also display institutional critique artwork. Natural History museums and historical societies have been used by artists like James Luna and Fred Wilson as sites for critique. These critiques seem especially effective outside the walls of art museums because they are often unexpected. Art museums are often the subject of critiques, but Natural History museums have issues that could be critiqued as well. The sale of fossils

⁴David Hopkins, *After Modern Art: 1945-2000*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 167, <http://books.google.com/books?id=JFuXfLYqQVsC&printsec=copyright&dq=HAACKE+GUGGENHEIM+BOARD+OF+TRUSTEES> (accessed November 5, 2008).

and the financing of their procurement by foreign companies would be an excellent subject for institutional critique artists.⁵

I am arguing that institutional critique artwork can be used as tool to highlight problems within the museum. Again, because institutional critique artwork is primarily Conceptual art, the museum problems being addressed in the artwork is often obscure at first glance. Therefore, there might be some disagreement to my labeling categories.

Even the most acclaimed institutional critique art exhibition, *Mining the Museum*, is not without criticism. New York Times art critic Michael Kimmelman writes that Fred Wilson “aims to convey certain messages. Those messages may be packaged in more or less clever ways, they may be ennobling and enduring. But the packaging is ultimately a means to an end and largely forgettable once the message has been revealed.”⁶ However, the packaging of Wilson’s messages is so unique and resounding that they stay with the viewer longer than the traditional impartment of messages. Both the object exhibited and those implied through their absence are given a power and poignancy. That is why institutional critique artwork would be an ideal framework for museum studies student to look at problems facing museums. The agendas conveyed by institutional critique artwork will stay with students longer than the traditional means.

From the Museum Perspective

Though institutional critique artists have found many ways to judge the museum as an institution from a position outside the museum profession, the issues they have

⁵If I were an institutional critique artist, I would design a dinosaur skeleton covered in corporate logos like a racecar to critique this trend.

⁶Michael Kimmelman. “ART VIEW; An improbable Marriage Of Artist and Museum,” *The New York Times* (August 2, 1992), <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E0CE4DD1539F931A3575BC0A964958260> (accessed November 7, 2008).

raised are not nearly as clear-cut as they may seem. Museum professionals have recognized all these problems before, and are continually trying to deal with them. There are often no easy solutions to these problems.

Collections

Deaccessions. The artwork of L. A. Angelmaker and Micheal Asher that deals with issue of deaccessioning is simplifying the issue. An object might be removed from a collection because they have acquired a better example or specimen of said object or the scope or focus of the collection has changed.

Humans on display. Both James Luna and Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Pena's artwork deals with museum's displaying "natives" like artifacts. This is fact is well known by the museum community. As discussed in Chapter four, Majorie Schwarzer writes about Native Americans living in museums in her book, *Riches, Rivals, & Radicals: 100 years of Museums in America*, published by the American Association of Museums. Charles Alan Watkins writes in his article "Unnatural History Museums":

...we are talking about a situation where one group of children goes to the National Museum of American History to learn about its ancestors within in the context of nation building, pioneering instincts, and scientific achievement, while another group of children learns about its ancestors at the National Museum of Natural History within the context of elephants, dinosaurs, and famous rocks. The names give the game away – some people are "American," while others are, well, "natural."⁷

Provenance. Though many museums have been found to have acquired artworks which the Nazis coerced from their original owners, the American Association of

⁷Charles Alan Watkins, "Unnatural History Museums," *Museum News* (July/August 1998), 31.

Museum has subsequently developed “Guidelines Concerning the unlawful appropriation of objects during the Nazi era.” This information is available freely on their website.⁸

Board of Trustees

Museum professionals know that there might be occasions when a board member has a conflict of interest. Many professions deal with same issue. Harold and Susan Skramstad write in their article, “A Conflict’s Resolution,” “...loyalty to the museum’s interests always takes precedence over individual personal, professional, or business interests. Always.”⁹

In *The Guerilla Girls Art Museum Activity Book*, they point out that they had created and adopted a code of ethics four years before the American Association of Museums did.¹⁰ In so doing they misinterpret the history of the American Association of Museums’ Code of Ethics. When reading the American Association of Museums 1989 Code of Ethics, there is no mention of previous versions, but that is no indication that there were not any.¹¹ The American Association of Museums first Code of Ethics was published in 1925, fifty-seven years before the Guerilla Girls were formed.¹²

⁸American Association of Museums, “Guidelines Concerning the Unlawful Appropriation of Objects During the Nazi Era,” http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/ethics/nazi_guidelines.cfm (accessed November 7, 2008).

⁹Harold and Susan Skramstad, “Conflict’s Resolution,” *Museum News* (July/August 2004).

¹⁰Guerilla Girls, 5.

¹¹American Association of Museums, *Code of Ethics for Museums* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1989). Ellie Caston, conversation with author, November 2, 2008.

¹²American Association of Museums, *Code of Ethics for Museums* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1991), 2. Guerilla Girls, 5.

Corporate Sponsorship

In her article, “Following the Money,” Patricia Failing, an *ARTnews* contributing editor and art history professor, quotes James Welu, the director of the Worcester Museum of Art, as saying, “People want their art museums to be like a church, having no connection to earthly realities.”¹³ However, museums need money in order to operate and corporations are willing to donate large sums of money to attach their name to something culturally significant.

In response the infamous Saatchi Collection’s show at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in which the public questioned the “anonymous” donation by Saatchi to cover insurance costs and donations from private dealers and Christie’s auction house.¹⁴ The American Association of Museums issued guidelines involving individual donations. In the guidelines, they acknowledge that individual donors have previously benefitted socially from their relationships with museums.¹⁵

Art Jahnke’s article, “Losing the Win-Win Game?”, examines the problems with corporate sponsorship for museums. Jahnke argues that it is not a “win-win” situation for the museum and the corporation. Jahnke quotes Michael Jacobson, the executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest and co-founder of the Center for the Study of Commercialism, in his article to examine problems stemming from corporate sponsorship. Jacobson believes that the corporation gets the better deal in the partnership

¹³Patricia Failing, “Following the Money,” *ARTnews* (January 2000), 153.

¹⁴Failing, 151.

¹⁵American Association of Museums, “Guidelines for Museums on Developing and Managing Individual Donor Support,” http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/ethics/indiv_support.cfm (accessed November 7, 2008). Ellie Caston, conversation with author, November 2, 2008.

with the museum.¹⁶ Jacobson states, “While a museum’s good name may enhance a company, a company’s bad name may impugn a museum’s reputation.”¹⁷ One such company whose products are now controversial themselves is the cigarette company Philip Morris. This company’s sponsorship of museum exhibitions has also been critiqued by Hans Haacke. Ironically, Philip Morris also sponsored the publication of the American Association of Museums’ *Museums for a New Century*. The CEO of Philip Morris writes in the foreword of the publication, “our own experience at Philip Morris, as a sponsor of more than 100 cultural events and exhibitions over the last quarter century, has shown us that business prospers where culture flourishes.”¹⁸ Note that the CEO is interested in bettering his business through sponsorship.

Museum Architecture

The phenomena of memorable museum architecture is an oft commented subject within the museum community. Franklin W. Robinson notes in his article, “Forum: No More Buildings!”, that museum buildings can be works of art. He argues that museums must not forget their missions in response to their “self-image.”¹⁹ He states, “We are in danger of losing our focus on what got us, personally, into this business long ago – the art itself – and what makes our institutions relevant to people in the first place.”²⁰

¹⁶Art Jahnke, “Losing the Win-Win Game?,” *Museum News* (September/ October 1993): 34-35.

¹⁷Jahnke, 35.

¹⁸American Association of Museums, *Museums for a New Century* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1984), 9.

¹⁹Franklin W. Robinson, “Forum: No More Buildings!,” *Museum News* (November/ December 2002).

²⁰Robinson.

Education/Visitor Experiences

The critiques of museum education and visitor experiences were not as harsh as other subject matter. By lampooning a bad docent, Andrea Frasier shows that there is an art to educating the public. In the same guise, the artwork of Janet Cardiff and Vito Acconci shows that the visitor's experience is the art produced by the museum. The Museum for a New Century report states, "If the collections are the heart of the museums, what we have come to call education—the commitment to presenting objects and ideas in an informative and stimulating way—is the spirit."²¹

Final Thoughts

Much has been written on institutional critique artwork, and the problems they deal with, but so far institutional critique art has not been used as a framework to look at problems in museums. Institutional critique can be defined broadly as artwork of varying media that assess critically the museum or gallery as an institution and/ or their practices. Institutional critique artwork has highlighted problems with collections, board of trustees, corporate sponsorship, museum architecture, and education/ visitor experiences.

The museum profession has not been unaware of these issues; they have attempted to deal with these issues and will continue to do so. These critiques are artistic interpretations, and are equally open to criticism. It is not always clear what audience institutional critique artists target with their artwork. The majority of the public would have a hard time understanding some of the issues raised without insight into the museum community. Perhaps one of the reasons that Fred Wilson's artwork is so successful is

²¹American Association of Museums, *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* (Washington, D.C. American Association of Museums, 1998), 10.

that he has worked in the museum profession. He has also collaborated with institutions to examine issues.

The people who would benefit from an examination of museum problems through such a framework would be current museum professionals and museum studies students. It is important for museum studies students to understand problems facing their future workplace and institutional critique artwork can serve as the lens to examine problems in museum. In addition, it is important for institutional critique artists to learn more about museum studies and the museum profession. Such knowledge would not stop artists from critiquing museums, but rather provide them with more insight that could enhance their artwork.

Institutional critique might always remain a minor art movement, but there will always be areas for artists to critique museums. More research can be done on whether institutional critique artwork has been proven to make an impact on the museum community and practices.

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