

**Backroom Conversations**  
**16 May 2009**

**Museum Focus: Participation, Collaboration and the Everyday**

Speakers: Leung Mee Ping (LMP), Daravuth Ly (DL), Frances Morris (FM), Hammad Nasar (HN), Rirkrit Tiravanija (RT)  
Moderator: Vasif Kortun (VK)  
Introduction: Claire Hsu (CH)

CH: Welcome back to our Museum Focus Panels: Backroom Conversations, presented by the Asia Art Archive for ART HK 09. For those of you who don't know, my name is Claire. I am the Director of an organization called the Asia Art Archive which is based in Hong Kong. We are a not for profit organization, a resource, documentation, research and ideas platform for contemporary Asian art. One of the things we do is to organize a lot of different public programmes and projects and think about issues prevalent to contemporary art issues today. Earlier this afternoon Charles Merewether moderated the panel on Art and Design which raised some very interesting issues, and this afternoon, following on from that, we have the panel on Participation, Collaboration and the Everyday.

This next panel considers the alternatives to the museum in a region with a very short museum going history, and also looks at what happens when projects are brought into the museum. A number of forums have been organized in the past few years as a result of plans to build to West Kowloon Cultural District project, and our intention this afternoon is not to point fingers nor come up with any definitive conclusions, but really to consider the possibilities of the software that we are always talking about.

We are extremely pleased to welcome writer, curator and teacher, Vasif Kortun as our moderator this afternoon, who is currently the Director of Platform Garanti Contemporary Art in Istanbul. Vasif is the Founding Director of the Museum for the Centre of Curatorial Studies at Bard College, the curator of the 2005 Istanbul Biennial and the 2008 Taipei Biennial, which closed, I think, in December. Please also let me welcome our speakers today – Leung Mee-ping, Frances Morris, Daravuth Ly, Hammad Nasar, and an artist whose name has become synonymous with thinking about these very issues, Rirkrit Tiravanija.

Again, I would like to begin by just saying that I know our speakers are on very short time limits but the reason for that is really to try and encourage as much conversation in the room as possible. Thank you all very much for your patience and we look forward to inviting you all back for longer projects and presentations in the future. I would like to finish quickly by saying thank you very much to the Home Affairs Bureau for making this possible, AXA, Burger and the ART HK 09 team. I would also like to thank my team who have been working incredibly hard over the past few months– Chantal, Enoch and Nana, for their hard work – thank you.

VK: Welcome and thank you for the invitation. I would like to thank Claire Hsu in particular, and the Asia Art Archive for their elegant and extremely warm hospitality in Hong Kong. I think this afternoon's session, the last session, in effect, of the day, is kind of coexisting with the previous panel. I was thinking as I was listening to the previous panel of issues about disciplinary knowledge. We sometime confuse disciplinary knowledge, or discipline, with the narrow focus of departmentalization that museums have historically fostered, although this is disappearing a little bit. When you are on the production end of things or you are at the start of things, when you are at the beginning of the thought process, you are not thinking in terms of disciplines, ever. Discipline is something that is done to you, not that you do. Also, co-extensive with that, where would Le Corbusier be without Xenakis or what would have happened to Rem Koolhaas without Cecil Balmond – we could go on forever with all these references that creativity and production is actually always a collaborative affair. It can be a collaboration within your head because you are not a unique individual, you are always at the cross roads of many things, many thoughts, what you ate that morning, what you saw on the street, and then you always produce with assistance. So, that's another issue.

So, for this Museum Focus we start with the premise that there is a lack or a deficit in terms of museums in the region. This also perhaps means that there is a lack of institutionalization. But this issue of gap and deficit is a bit, I think, ambiguous, because there are great cities in the centres that we remember, there are great institutions, or used to be great institutions, in the centres we remember, but they're really not doing so well these days. Charles Merewether gave the example of the Museum of Modern Art, or we can look at the New York cityscape today – in terms of institutions a lot of them hardly fulfil their historical mission that they had proposed. So there is a gap all over the place and there are alternative models coming up all around the world.

Obviously there is a desire for museums and this desire seems to be quite heavy in the off-centre places these days. But what we are going to do today is something else – we are going to look at the situations and contexts that have invented themselves as unique structures, without necessarily referential models of how an institution should be but building an institution from the ground up, and seeing where that meets another form of institutionalization. So we are going to go through this and then we are going to end with Frances, I guess, where she will speak a bit about how such practices, collaborative practices, meet the museum because there is an obvious issue of archiving and storage, how the memory of the work is kept because collaborative practices are usually practices that are fragile, more tender than physical work that is kept in a very particular way. They are tender because of the lack of documentation, and they are tender and fragile in many other ways. The history of this is not from today, it didn't start in the '90s, it has a very strong history of fifty years, at least, and we may imagine that the whole thing started with the invention of the public when David was doing his street performances, just before the French Revolution, for which we have no documents other than some words flying in the air. It is a thing for which we don't have an object. So that is something to think about when we later consider how to pass this onto future generations. So the issue of archiving is critical.

We will start with Hammad Nasar. He is a curator, writer and gallerist based in London.

He is a co-founder of the not for profit association called The Green Cardamom, which is an arts organization that develops and runs visual arts projects in collaboration with public museums and institutions. The organizations primary focus is international contemporary art viewed from an Indian Ocean perspective, and their programmes are informed by artistic practice in Pakistan, South Central Asia and, more recently, the Middle East. Nasar will focus on the Lines of Control project, or rather a constellation of projects started in 2007; the discussions started in 2005 during a conference, and it touches on the notion of commemoration, based upon British India's partition in 1947 – commemoration as an event or commemoration as a constellation of activities spread out during time without an end in sight.

HN: Thank you. Perhaps I should face this way – I feel terribly conscious that I am ignoring folks here, so this way I probably have most of you in my peripheral vision, but at least I don't have my back to anyone. Let me just explain. Vasif talked about the Indian Ocean centric view – let me elaborate. Green Cardamom was set up in London, and that is where we are based, although we work pretty much globally. It was a reaction to what struck us as a very Euro-American, or to put it another way, Atlantic Ocean centric view of what passed for International in London's contemporary art scene. Our idea was that, firstly this is an anomaly, given the depth of cultural exchange between the UK and particularly Asia, and it was something that we wanted to do something about. So we started as a curatorial collective working with public museums. Out of that, for example we currently have a show with the British Museum, which I hope was not the show that William's friend saw and rushed out of after half an hour. This is the sort of thing we do – we organize symposia, we co-publish with museums, gallery programmes is one half of how we get funded, the other half is funded by a charitable foundation. So, in a nutshell, everything we do, by necessity, is a collaboration, between organizations, between individuals, between artists and us, and between us and others.

Having established that let me tell you a little bit about the genesis of this project, Lines of Control, then I will share with you three images of the works that have been produced and were shown in different parts of the world. Then we will bring you up to date as to how this project is moving forward. The genesis actually started from another project, from an archive, the AAA will be pleased to note. The Royal Geographical Society, which some of you may have come across, is a real treasure trove of things as varied as arctic explorers shopping lists from Harrods dating back to 1911, to Sir Richard Burton's travel diaries as he dressed up as an Arab and went to Mecca for the first time. They had asked us to respond to their archives in a series of notes, and one of the things that struck me while I was going through this was... I came across just how much of the British Empire's wealth was controlled and generated out of what were called territories 'controlled' by the East India Company. Once I started looking into that, what struck me was the lack of knowledge about what happened to India in Partition, the creation of new nations, and the fact that this was not a topic that was taught in schools in world history. Fifteen million people were displaced; one million people died; the British Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, who oversaw the Partition, summed it up beautifully, and I quote "I fucked it up". So here was a huge part of history we are still living with, you just have to look at

what is happening with India and Pakistan right now, but people didn't know about it. It was coming up to sixty years of partition in 2007 and being the visual person I am, I thought it would be the time for a good exhibition, you know, we really need to look at this. Where is the visual memory of Partition. The way we started was to set up a workshop, chaired by one of the co-curators of *Documenta II*, Sarat Maharaj, and we invited geographers, historians, cartographers, filmmakers, curators and artists to come and just talk for two days.

Out of that came a realization that the last thing the world needs is another large exhibition. What we probably want to do is a series of 'things'. And the 'constellation' (not mine, it was suggested by Sarat) is what we talked about – small things which talk to each other and perhaps will build a better picture. That included artists' talks, film screenings... The talks were at Goldsmiths College, the screenings were at the RGS and the Whitechapel. Then, a final ingredient was a research fellowship I did at Goldsmiths working with Irit Rogoff who is a sort of heavy weight particularly in looking at how visual culture can be navigated through geography. I learnt three things that have helped shaped this project.

One was that what started from commemoration turned out to be about the present moment, so it's not about history, it is actually about understanding today, and 2008, foreign affairs...the American influential *International Relation* magazine did a special issue on partitions where Geoffrey Muller argued that this will be the century of partitions, wherever ethnic nationalism raises its head partition is the least worst option. If you doubt that think about Kosovo, think about South Ossetia, think about the Tamils right now. Secondly, this is not about the Partition of India, so we usually talk about the Partition with a capital P, but partitions, and the idea is that yes, they are all specific stories but they are also a universal story, which is something shared. The way we have now dealt with it is through a series of exhibitions and a film programme and we chose to work with artists who have really lived and breathed this issue, so the idea was not just to identify the issue, send out an email and get twenty proposals back. The idea was to actually engage in conversation with artists who had been working on this issue, and their work served almost as critical text to this open ended enquiry we were carrying out.

There was a three-location exhibition. The first one started in Dubai at a commercial gallery called the Third Line. You can understand that Dubai is not very well served by public museums, at least not yet; the second one was in Karachi, again at a not for profit space, no museums of art exist; the third one was in London at our little space. We invited Nicole Wolf who teaches film at Goldsmiths to curate the film programme and she put together a really hard core programme with film-makers from India and Pakistan, from Israel and Palestine, and from the two Germanys, so where we are talking about partition, she is also talking about the fact that the partitions are then sort of sutured. It was twenty years after the breakdown of the Berlin wall, so how do you make peace with your partitioned selves and come together again.

The issue became a lot more current than we had intended, with the terror attack in Bombay. We wanted to hold a symposium in Karachi, to which were coming Amar

Kanwar, Nalini Malani and the Raqs Media Collective (I think they may be known to you because I know they were artists in residence at the AAA not too long ago).

Unfortunately we had to cancel the event because the Indian government had issued travel advisory warnings, the venue that was going to hold the symposium had started to get cold feet and had started receiving threats to the trustees. And then, to put the cherry on top, the sponsor that we had in Dubai, a bank, of course collapsed. So we were left with no sponsorship money. What we then ended up doing was, there were two commercial galleries and a not for profit space, we decided that we would do it ourselves, and the idea was that if there any sales (a lot of the work was just borrowed form museums and collections) would then fund the show.

I would like to share with you three works that were shown. I am cheating – Vasif had instructed that we were only allowed three images, and you will notice that I have put three in the first slide, but I set the slides so at least there are only three slides. I hope I'm forgiven. This is a work that was produced by Nalini Malani, an Indian artist who was born in Karachi in 1946, and Iftikhar Dadi, the Karachi based Pakistani artist whose parent's came to Karachi from Bombay. It was originally conceived back in 1997 when they first did this collaboration and that the work was then destroyed. So when we approached them to think about doing something, they wanted to go back and re-image this piece, and its been realized with Mr Abdul Khaliq and his team in Karachi, so these are people who normally work with wedding dresses, and what it is, is sequins, so what you see are the Radcliffe Lines, the Radcliffe Commission. In fact, let me read you a little paragraph from Iftikhar. The guy teaches art history and art practice at Cornell so I think he will probably say this better than I do:

“The rectangular panels mimic the mapping and classificatory processes that define borders, seeming with detached scientific objectivity. However, the red border lines, much of which were drawn by the Radcliffe Commission, appointed by the departing British in a hasty and uninformed fashion, run across this field of gold as arbitrary lines of blood. Yet the dense golden sequins enact an allegory of the individual, affirming its uniqueness, and their diversity, yet also suggesting that their coming together illuminates and enriches the entire region without limit.”

If we can go to the second slide... This is a work by Seher Shah, a young New York based artist. In fact the way she came to the exhibition itself was a bit of a collaboration. I was talking about this particular project in Shanghai in 2007 with Elaine (I don't know if she is here) from Art Asia Pacific. Her response was “Why don't you do something forus?” So I wrote a short piece and I got an email from Seher saying “look, this is my life, I must be part of this project”. So I said OK, let's see some work and let's talk, and what came out of that was another series of collaborations which she came over to the UK, spent a couple of weeks with us, and went to the archives of the RGS, the V&A, the British Library, and the British Photo Archive in Birmingham. She mixed those with her own family archives. She is of Pakistani origin but married to a Sikh, an Indian whose grandfather was actually the Indian army General responsible for the safe passage of Muslims from India to Pakistan. So this was very much the personal as it was the political. So what she then produced was a large body of work which is ongoing, and this

is a part of it where she is using archival photographs, maps, she is looking at monuments that have been left in India as commemoration marks, but to commemorate what? One wonders...

The third piece that I want to talk about is actually probably the first piece we put on the paper when we looked at who we wanted to have in this exhibition. This is a work by Sophie Ernst, a Berlin based Dutch artist, who has been working on this project for the last three years. Why so long? Because of the money. Whenever we come up with a museum or a biennial, which will help produce a chunk of it, we do a little bit more. The first time this was done... She has been filming artists, both Indian and Pakistani, interviewing their parents and grandparents, about the homes they left behind at the time of Partition. Clips of that film are projected onto architectural models. These are not scale models, they are sort of temporal models, so the same thing appears at several different places. Her project is around unlocking memory and looking at the ideals of home. What we particularly liked was that once you are actually listening to the piece it's impossible to tell who is Pakistani or who is Indian, or when this piece was shown in Shah'je, and it had been extended to cover Palestinians and Israelis, apart from the language the stories are very, very similar.

That brings us to a few of the pieces, and you can see why we chose those pieces to talk about in collaboration. I will leave it here with what's happening now with the show. Cartwright Hall, a museum in Bradford, is interested in taking elements of this, so we are going to be showing it later this year, under the title *How Nations Are Made*, and we will be developing projects with artists from the Middle East who also work on these issues. Thank you.

VK: If anyone has a question that cannot wait until the end of the talks, please raise it now, or if not, we will just go on to the next speaker.

Our next speaker is Leung Mee-ping. She is a Hong Kong based artist with an extensive local and exhibition history. She is a lecturer at The Academy of Visual Art at the University of Hong Kong, where she teaches both contemporary art theory and studio arts. Her research focuses on visual culture, cities, media and globalization. Her work spans across a variety of media and site specific events based projects. Her projects include *Memorize the Future* where she collected hair from more than 10,000 people from hair salons, the internet, garbage cans and so on, and she has reconstructed this hair into thousands of child sized shoes. She will elaborate on her recent projects and she also has the difficult task of grounding the discussion in a Hong Kong context. Thank you.

LMP: Hi, I think focusing on today's topic, Vasif selected two of my works *Memorize the Future* and *Poems of Castle Peak* as examples. Somehow I would also like to present more of my latest works, made in Hong Kong for a point of reference related to the topic. The process for *Memorize the Future* was very long, starting in 1998 and going on until 2008. I collected hair from over a hundred different races, ages, across the geographical

boundaries – you can see that the light and quality of hair collected varies. In three years I modelled the hair into children's shoes by myself – there are almost 10,000 hair shoes in total (rather than collecting from 10,000 people). These hair shoes were displayed in a pure whitespace all facing in the direction, and I think these shoes give collaborated images of humans at first sight.

The second project which was just shown once in Hong Kong, at Hanart Gallery, it was purchased in 2003. The story started with me working a mental hospital and, my observations during that time, I found that the opinion box, the feedback box in the hospital, the letterbox for collecting comments on the hospital's service was always full of little paper notes, so I brought them home and there were so many broken sentences and different handwriting, written by different patients. There was a lot of continuous meaning and having been collected in a hospital as well, because most of the patients were diabetic with urinary incontinence. I displayed the work on a white brick wall and the work was shown at the gallery event.

The last one made in Hong Kong is a project that has been in process since 2007. I hired a group of trade painters that...they are kind of like tourist painters... from a factory from the neighbouring city of Shenzhen, to mass produce a series of images such as Mickey Mouse in Hong Kong Disney Land. This is inspired by particular trends in souvenir paintings, or trade paintings that catered to foreign tourists during the '70s. As we notice, most tourists come from mainland China, which is a totally different tourist landscape since 1997. To gain a broader understanding of what constitutes a professional trade painter, I became a student under the master from the painting factory, and we produced the paintings together to see who is the author, respectively. More than 200 paintings with repeated images were exhibited together with a video of about eleven minutes, documenting my learning process and including dialogues with my teacher on the topics of art, taste and quality. I think this project consists of various aspects of collaboration, participation and the everyday, and it is also a representation somehow in a gallery, in my living place. Also in the factory, I sold it directly to the tourists and I also sold it directly to collectors and somehow I think it raises another aspect of what collaboration and participation is, related to today's topic.

VK: Our next speaker is someone with a second name I just learnt how to pronounce, Rirkrit Tiravanija. He needs no introduction; nevertheless, I shall read a bit from his biography. He was born in Buenos Aires in 1961, he was raised in Thailand, Ethiopia, Canada and educated in Chicago and New York. Now he lives between Berlin and New York and also spends time in Thailand. His work is exhibited around the world in major museums, galleries and at international arts events. He was co-curator of 'The Utopian Station' in 2003, during the Venice Biennale, and since 1998 he has been working on The Land, a large scale, trans-disciplinary, collaborative project near Chiang Mai in Thailand. Rirkrit will speak about three possibilities which he calls an open system, a closed system and a personal system, outlining three distinct modes of authorship and collaboration, and I would also like to ask Rirkrit to explain a bit about the notion of returning to a place one could call home and working from there, returning the gift, in a way.

RT: So, three images and ten minutes was the restriction, and you have to kind of squeeze your brain to try to get around it so I actually started to make three finely tuned points and I suddenly realized that all the three works I am going to show here are actually not really works... well, there's only one work really... they are all actually in Thailand, so it was actually quite interesting to look at that notion of returning home, and Michael also talked about it earlier today. I looked at in relationship to this idea of collaboration and my whole life is one big collaboration – I feel like I am always, in a sense, going through life working with other people. I mean it somehow seems to be a natural part of me so it is very much embedded in just the way I go around. I thought, well, let's look at this idea. Collaboration, I think, can be many things, as Vasif said, how can you think about one person without the other because they are always reflecting on each other. And so with that in mind, I thought we could look at what I've been involved in and try to maybe define it a bit, like what's the difference between working on a piece of land which is pretty much open and also pretty much, in a way trying very hard not to be confined or defined or named, and also trying very much to be just a platform.

Of course The Land, as much as we, the participants who have been involved in it, have been denying that it is a kind of art project or art work, has always been discussed in terms of an art project and I think part of it is because most of the people who are involved with it are involved with art, but also I think, somehow, it seems to be that other place, you know, which we all can look forward to, away from what we do everyday. It started off as a kind of retreat. Initially we talked about the idea of a kind of retirement place for artists, like opera singers have an opera retirement home where they all go and sing together. So we thought that artists could have a place where they all go and sit with each other and talk about what they had done or what they were thinking about. So, we thought it could be like a retirement place. It came from many directions. I initially spoke with many friends that I had been working with and exhibiting with in the West, and we had, at one point, tried to find a house in the middle of France, and to make it like a safe house where we could go and meet and get away from things. But it was very difficult in Europe, it was very bureaucratic, it involved a lot of financial consideration which none of us really could afford, so it was a floating idea that we all had at some point.

I then started to go back to Thailand more often in the late 1990s and I went to Chiang Mai and met some young artists there and had very interesting discussions with the people there, and one of the people who co-founded The Land, Kamin Letchaiprasert, who is also a local Thai artist there, started to talk to me about this idea of making this retirement place. He said we should get in the car and look at this piece of land, so we drove that afternoon and went to the place a saw a big rice field and he said that we could do it very quickly, and very inexpensively so I said, "OK, let's do it". Our first idea was that we would just plant some trees, and when ever anyone came around they could decide what they wanted to do. So it is pretty much been that for almost ten years. If there is nothing going on there, at least there are mango trees growing on the site, and it has various different degrees of activities and people's involvement in it. The pictures I have here are actually images of young artists and art students who have come around at the harvesting and planting of the rice planting season, to work on the field to grow rice, and we do that twice a year, and every year the harvest is yielded and everybody gets a share of it. If there is any extra then we would give it to some of the neighbours who need help.

So that was one ongoing, very stable activity.

At the same time, a lot of the artists in Chang Mai, or young artists who went to the art school there wanted to have a place for discussion and wanted to have a place to talk about art, and think about art. So that became an integral part of the activity, when people went out there to do the farming. At this point, there are a few different structures which I don't have an image for, but... of little huts that different artist have come around and built, and they, of course, built them in their own way, which could be sculptural in some sense, but they are little shelters that people can use when they come and visit the place. We also have a kind of residency programme for young people – well, actually for anybody – and basically they come and live for a year on the land and they do different activities in terms of just surviving on this piece of land throughout the year, and of course part of that is constantly talking about different ideas that they want to develop with their own work.

Let's go to the next image... It's quite dark but... When I first returned to Thailand I really was kind of trying to figure out what I should do with myself. In a sense I am quite well known for making food and things like that, but if you go to Bangkok and everybody is cooking and eating on the side of the road, so I found myself kind of irrelevant, in a way. But at the same time, meeting with younger artists and students made me realize that there is always a kind of gap between being an artist and trying to survive as artists. There is a kind of gap because there is no venue to show your work, no real support from the government. So we decided to find a kind of structure to somehow make a venue for this discussion. Initially we developed a magazine, which a lot of people contributed to, and it is a kind of ongoing magazine that gets made whenever there is money or material. At the same time as this office started to develop itself, we started to realize that there weren't any spaces, or the spaces that were there, which were showing work by younger artists, weren't available. So we decided to turn the office into a gallery space and I insist on calling it an artist run for profit space, because all the not for profit spaces collapsed because people didn't really support them, even though they were not for profit. So we said, we're going to work for profit, partly so that it can fund the young artists who need to find a way to not only survive, but also to continue to make their work, and then also to be relevant as a discussion, with the whole idea of a system or a structure.

So this particular piece of collaboration, it is actually a defined space, it has a defined activity and it has a defined goal, whereas The Land itself was very open, and in many ways, although I am kind of like the representative of it because I often have to talk about it, it is a kind of non property, unclaimed space, it is left open for people to enter and claim that area or that particular situation that they could find for themselves. Whereas in this particular space, which is called the Ver Gallery, you know, it is much more defined. People come in and they make their work, they exhibit their work, there are discussions (maybe you could change to the next image...) there are different activities, it's very similar, but it's all kind of based on the idea of the discourse of art.

The last image is more of a personal structure, which I follow more as a practising artist. That's my double who has been travelling around. Initially he went to Beijing dressed up as me. He doesn't say that he's me but some people think he looks like me, so... He

usually goes and shakes people's hands and gives them a big hug and smiles, but he doesn't say anything, he just appears. In this particular situation, it was the opening of the museum in Bangkok. Finally, after a lot of debate and fights we finally get a museum in Bangkok, which is now standing fairly empty, most of the time. I asked... I call him No. 1... to go to the exhibition and, along with meeting and greeting people, he gives them a balloon and people can do whatever they want with the a balloon but generally they let them go into the empty space. In this situation, you know, I am very specific and very precise, and I am very much involved with how the situation is being played out and how the participation, or how the collaboration is actually a part of the work itself.

I think I will stop there for now, thank you.

VK: The next speaker is Daravuth Ly. He is the Director and co-founder of Reyum Institute of Arts and Culture, a non-profit organization in Phnom Penh, although I understand it is going to cut some profit very soon, which we may discuss a little bit later. It is dedicated to contemporary art and traditional arts and culture of Cambodia and Reyum has been around for more than ten years now. Daravuth is also a lecturer in art history in the Faculty of Archaeology at the Royal University of Fine Arts, which is basically across the street from the Reyum Institute. He is also an academic advisor to the Asia Art Archive. Following Rirkrit, he will speak about three projects that involve participation, collaboration and the everyday. Thank you Daravuth.

DL: Good afternoon everyone. I took the assignment from the AAA literally, so I am going to talk about the three words of the title of the panel, and I took three pictures. I hope that each one of the examples will illustrate some issues related to these three words. So, let's start.

This is an example of work that is linked to Siu King-chung's earlier presentation. It is a similar project that we did in Cambodia where we collect what we call 'popular creativity'. So amongst the three examples, most of it is what you could call cultural anthropology rather than contemporary art per se. I do have one example of contemporary art though. Because this panel is about participation, collaboration and everyday, I tried to think about how a work contributes to, thinks about or fails to address this issue. In this project we surveyed and documented practices in rural Cambodia, of objects that people do and create and, like your project, we don't have any specific theme, we just collect, and then we try to look at... we have thousands of pictures, but here I can only show one. There are many problems surrounding this practice, which we cannot address today. I showed this example not to say that this practice is art practice, it's not really the point, there are many everyday practices over many years and the art field is a different field. What I am doing here is to show examples more of the idea of creativity, resources, resources for artists and for researchers, and I saw Ron's reaction this morning – the first reaction was "give me the pictures". So it means that as a designer he is interested in these pictures, as a resource to develop further. I don't know how to think about that because, at some point you said... various people talked about authorship. I don't know if they don't have a discourse about the art, or whether the

discourse is not what we understand as artistic discourse.

So, looking at all these examples, the main drive is, of course, functionality. People create objects because of their functionality. So, the two pictures at the top of the screen now – one is a flower pot made of a tyre, a car tyre, and I think that the functionality is only to have a round container, but I don't know why people needed to make this beautiful. This is a traditional Khmer ornament design and it has been done rurally, and I want to challenge this idea that there is only functional and practical and economical, so there is something out there that goes further than that. This image also shows a recycled... there are big garment factories in Cambodia, and the garment factories throw away the scraps, and people of course make useful... this is a pillow. There is something about this creative component that is beyond functionality. Here is a plastic bottle, but it becomes a flowerpot, and this is the same but used to decorate pagodas.

There are hundreds and hundreds of examples like that, and I think they are resources for designers, artists... and I think this example, and it could be something to discuss and is linked to the previous panel, which is the issue of authorship. I think it is very important – authorship, ownership – because there is a sense of belonging that is also linked to the debate. You were talking about building the M+ project, Charles, and you raised the issue about who is entitled to decide what kind of museum, what is the content and who is it for? I think those are very interesting questions because it asks the question of the entitlement to the ownership of something, whether it is creativity or whether it is an object. So this example is to look at how the everyday can inform us of some of the creative processes that are out there. I insist that I am not thinking of this as an issue of art and design, but I am just so interested in the ideas and content behind that and it would be great to look at it as a sort of resource but also to produce some sort of discourse on that, in a more pertinent way.

So, my second example is an artistic example. This is a collaborative project with a group of Vietnamese artists. Contrary to the previous project where we just surveyed and looked at what we call creative practice, this one is intentionally artistic, it is a performance. So with a group of Vietnamese artists we performed in front of a very crowded river front walkway in Phnom Penh, and we lined up and brushed our teeth, for hours. Knowing that... I don't know... Dinh Le from Vietnam is here in the audience – Hi!... Tran Lung is an artist but he is also a friend, so we have known each other for a long time, but the relationship between Cambodia and Vietnam is very difficult, whether it is justified or not. So to do that piece was very hard for us because of the troubled relationship between the two countries, and also because the NGO world is promoting health and hygiene. So there is confusion. We decided that if people asked us what it was, we would just say that it is an art work. The performance was followed by discussions and it went on into the evening, and then at around 6pm I started to have problems with the local police so we had to stop. This is just an example of how to engage with the public. When we think about the public or the audience, we ought to ask what kind of audience we are talking about. The audience in Hong Kong is different because the context in Hong Kong is different. The audience in Cambodia is different, not only because the political situation is different, the economic situation is different and the knowledge or the level of awareness of art and the cultural scene is different. So I think we need to look at what

kind of audience we are dealing with. So this one is about collaboration.

I wanted to show this third example because I am very interested in the idea of the archive and collection. I want us to come back to idea of collection, and if we engage with the idea of audience...how do we think of the audience? Let us say, we are here not as the audience, you are the audience. We establish a dynamic which is essential to the development of dialogue. For example we had a project a long time ago, about an eight year-long project of oral history documentation. We interviewed old people about the history of Cambodia, and through that we collected so much material, because people gave us so much, pictures that were being discovered and we ended up with a collection that we have now, I mean some of it, and the reason why I want to talk about a collection is because out of that project we curated exhibitions. This is an example of an exhibition about clothing, but there is one that is also about food in Cambodian culture, the catalogue is in Khmer, so I'm sorry. Anyway, we draw material from that archive and we curated this exhibition. These women were part of the project, they were interviewed, and it's quite problematic because we invited them to come to the opening and of course, first of all most of them have never been to Phnom Penh and to come for an opening would be really strange, and the question of our responsibility of creating that, what does it mean to do that? The thing is that they are the ones who made the objects of the exhibition and, for this exhibition, were turned all the objects, we didn't keep them.

We touched upon the idea of museums in New York who are pushed to develop an audience. The relevance of this museum might be in question if they don't have, let's say, 10,000 visitors per day. So it's about quantity, the audience is a number. While in this project I think that something happened. It is hard because we have not processed the impact of what happened as a result of these exhibitions, but I can assure you that people felt they belonged to the project in one way or another. But of course there is a problem; what is the role of Reyum as a gallery? And, as Ron said, in this role we are the curator, we decided it, and we made the event happen, we created something, so there is a certain degree of responsibility on us, curating that space. People asked why we collected all these things, for example, and we replied that it was because although they know about these things, their children or grandchildren might not, and that encouraged them to participate.

So, you see, I think it is the relevance of the content of what we do that makes the audience, and that is one of the questions that should be thought about. If, to take MoMA as an example, if it needs to develop an audience, maybe it's work is not relevant, so it has to be forced, in a way. So how can we think about the audience differently? It means that you have to re-think what you do and not, as previously mentioned, take the existing audience and propose something to them. Ownership and participation is part of this process.

It is hard to talk about so many things in ten minutes. What I would like to look at is in all these talks I have been to in the past few days, there are issues of ownership, authorship, belonging, ways home, the issue of home etc. I think these issues are related to the topic of today but they are not thought of in terms of what it means for us to do the work that we do, for example. When we work with an audience, to what extent are we ready to reassess? While building institutions it becomes heavier and heavier so that, in a way,

there comes a point that the more we try to do something for the audience, the less we reach that audience. I think that Reyum has failed in some of its missions that it was aiming for. For example, we are still a white box, we have not been able to go further; we set out to work locally but we failed to do it on a more international level; we said that we wanted to develop a discourse – we used to publish in both English and Khmer, but now we only publish in Khmer because of lack of resources.

So all these issues, I think, unless an institution like a museum is able to reconsider its role and its existence it cannot be... I mean it has to be able to reconsider and accept the fact that it has to die for example, or it has to... even if it's big. I think that is the difficulty for big institutions is to think of its end, and I think the collapse of financial institutions is a great example. I had never imagined that Morgan Stanley would fail one day. It seemed so big and so strong. But all these issues, to integrate death within our practice is a sign of life.

VK: Thank you Daravuth. Obviously there are zombie institutions which still think they are alive. We are now moving from lean institutions, a form of artistic agency, to a heavier institution. Our next speaker is Frances Morris. She is Head of Collections: International Art, at Tate Modern in London. She was formerly their Head of Displays where she curated the first major re-hang of the collection in 2006. In 1997 she was appointed Programme Curator for Tate Modern and contributed to the programming of pre-opening projects in and around Bankside, as well as developing the opening installation of the permanent collection. Today she will focus on the restaging and absorption of works of a certain kind, either material or ephemeral, into the museum structure, and how participatory or collaborative works can find a place in the museum. Thank you Frances.

FM: In a way, I suppose I am trying to talk about how a museum like Tate can or might respond to some of the kind of practices that we have been discussing on the platform today. Tate is a 19<sup>th</sup> century institution in its inception. It has a huge collection, 65,000 items, including British art from 1500 to the present day and international art from around 1900 to the present day. I suppose one of the interesting things now about Tate's collecting remit is that, unlike the heavy weight comparable institutions like MoMA and Pompidou, for example, which are governed by semi-autonomous departments devoted to different media such as painting, sculpture, design and architecture, Tate has always had an exclusive focus on art. The other things have never been part of its remit. Although, I think for many decades, this was seen as a sign of weakness in and institutions, in fact, ironically, it has allowed it to become, in some ways, very responsive to new initiatives within art, and that take art well beyond, and enmeshing the border lines between, all those other areas and discourses. Although we didn't have a department of photography, as artists began to engage with lens-based practices from the 1960s onwards, or began to work with media, Tate was able to absorb and collect in those areas without having a separate department, or turf wars between curators who regarded a particular discipline as their specialisms. And now, of course, in a contemporary world where artists move seamlessly between different media – artists will do sculpture one day, a performance the

next, or they'll go and write a book or till the soil for a year – none of those things are, in essence problematic if you don't have those categorical divisions between departments. Of course what has been more challenging is not the collecting and documentation of performative work or gallery based practices that are documented, but are the kind of relational or collaborative projects, some of which we have been talking about today.

We have been trying to approach those projects, both in terms of the programme itself, being involved in generating those projects, and also bringing them into the institution because, of course, one of the things that we want to do, or that is at the very foundation of the museum, is to both reflect on, and reconsider the history of art, and in our collecting process try and build a collection that will then speak to future generations of the history of now. Therefore our duty bound to respond to artists' initiatives right across the board. It is no longer tenable to ignore a major part of art practice. Of course working in this way mirrors the more recent recognition that the museum itself addresses not a one-dimensional audience, but a shifting collective of audiences from different backgrounds, and with different profiles. Again for those conflicting audiences, those contingent audiences, the museum embraces a number of different types of spaces, so that it is a contradictory and complex public space.

I just wanted to touch base on a number of particular works that we have acquired or engaged with in recent years. The first slide shows two works that we have acquired recently. The first, on the left by Rirkrit – and he might want to comment on this piece later– we've never made a project with Rirkrit but he is obviously hugely important in relation to the whole development of relational practices and the way artists have worked in social spaces and with social conventions and discourse. This is a work that is a kind of portable builder's shed, the kind of thing that a building company would have on their site full of their equipment, and Rirkrit used this portable shed as a cooking station from which he made and served food to gallery goers at a project in Berlin in 2005. I think, if I'm right in saying that this was the last time you made cooking at an event environment, is that right?

RT: Well, it was the last Pad Thai.

FM: OK, the last Pad Thai! So, for a museum of the history of art this is an important moment to record and safeguard, and of course one of the responsibilities of an institution like Tate, and it's something that we can do, and we can do unquestionably well, is to look after stuff like this. We have the storage facilities, we have specialists, we know how to look after old rice for as long as we can, so it's an archiving process. But when we show the work in the gallery, in a way it only exists as a trace or a document, and one of the interesting things that art historians will continue to debate is what is the actual work of art. Is it that? Or is it the memory or is it in the participants?

On the right hand side is another relational or performative work that Tate has acquired recently, only last year. It was a performance piece by the Cuban artist Tania Bruguera, and it is a project that involved the artist commissioning the local London Metropolitan

Police force, the mounted police on horses, to execute, in the gallery, with our normal everyday audience some of the crowd control techniques that police use all over the world for controlling large numbers of people in public spaces, whether there is a political demonstration, or a football crowd, and so the public become semi-willing or, by default, willing participants in a performance that has some double edged and provocative meanings for them, especially when played out in a public institution like the gallery. So, in a case like this it was a project we were involved in commissioning and staging and we have now acquired the performance, and what we have acquired is not a record or trace, not a film, but a certificate of authenticity, signed by the artist, and a series of instructions, incredibly specific instruction, about the commissioning and staging and duplication of the performance on future public occasions, including very specific instructions about how you announce the project and how it should be documented each time. This is one of an increasing number of live performances that the collection is acquiring, and in each case the specification from the artist is slightly different.

This is a slide of a performance event that took place last year, in 2008, and every year we do something which we call The Long Weekend which is essentially a programme over four days, a long weekend, of mostly live events and performances which we do, not so much as an audience building exercise because we already have more audience than any museum can cope with, but it is an exercise in engaging with the audience, so that audiences who might come to the gallery on a regular basis in a relatively passive, spectator way, with a one to one engagement with objects, this event is all about having a deeper engagement with artists and projects that kind of underpin and interact with and amplify the meanings, associations and possibilities of more static works in the collection. We have, at the Tate, a really amazing collection of Fluxus work, which interestingly historically resides in our archive, not in our main collection, but we do show it in our main galleries, and last year we disinterred... Fluxus was a connectivity, relatively international in the '60s and '70s, who worked in a number of innovative, radical new ways transgressing borders, between disciplines, and working with theatre, live performance, music, public and private, transgressive and relatively conventional modes The founder of Fluxus, George Maciunas, always wanted to do was to stage an Olympics, a Fluxus Olympics, with a huge array of strange, bizarre, radical, challenging, different modes of competition and interactivity. So, we commissioned a number of veteran Fluxus artists to make and stage the very first Fluxus Olympiad, which had only existed as an idea or as a series of utopian propositions. This took place over The Long Weekend in May of last year. On the slide you will see a very slow bicycle race; there was badminton with hugely long rackets; there was blow-football all of which engaged people over a long period of time. In essence, the idea was to animate, underpin and interact with the more dry, as it were, archival, documentary material in the galleries themselves.

And finally, I just wanted to talk about a project that was part of the pre-opening programme for Tate Modern, when we were for three years a museum without walls, and working with artists and communities in the vicinity we began three projects to rehearse ideas around the museum, around collecting, around documenting, around disciplines, around the visual arts, those sorts of contexts. Over a long, three month summer of 1999,

Marc Dion, an American artist and anthropologist ethnographer, worked with a group of sixty volunteers on two archaeological sites along the river Thames, one on the South side near Tate Modern and one on the North bank near Tate Britain, in an evocation of a kind of 19<sup>th</sup> century archaeological camp, and after six weeks of picking up objects we had a tent city on a grassy patch where objects were washed, examined, labelled, boxed up, categorized and a series of daily talks and seminars involving the whole range of people and specialists involved with the Thames and with London's history, so forensic police officers, archaeologists, Lord Renfrew who came to the debate last night was one of the visitors, and so the project was about a kind of living discourse. It was very much exploring that kind of Bayesian notion that the core of art is around thought and discussion. At the time there was no vision that there would be anything more than a collaborative community project, but as the project evolved, people got more and more interested and it became almost like a sort of paradigm for the museum itself. The final version of the project took place, which was to create a Wunderkammer for the museum, in which the kind of alternative discourses and classification that were being discussed around these objects, could be or made manifest in a more permanent form. This project was eventually acquired by the museum as a cabinet of curiosities, a Wunderkammer for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but when it is shown in the gallery, it is also shown alongside (you can just see on the back wall there) portraits, studio portrait photographs of all the collaborators, who become the authors of the work, and also with a documentary film that charts its process from beginning to end during that long, hot summer in 1999.

That's it – three or four ways of exploring the everyday and collaborative.

VK: Thank you all for a very coherent set of presentations. I am going to pass the mantle over to the audience right away unless you have questions to ask each other. Maybe we are sometimes over concerned about issues of ethics when it comes to the so-called divide between art and what not and all of these things, that's a little bit of self censorship, I think. There is no problem with ornamentation without aesthetics, you know, I mean aesthetics as an institutionalized category rather than as something that is beautiful; aesthetics is not an institutionalized category, ornamentation as aesthetics is, I think, fine. Also collaborations are fine, you know, they go back and they go on. We cannot interrupt them or stop them from their own activities in that universe, anyhow, no matter how much we institutionalize them for a brief period of time, it never kills it, it just goes on. History has shown this to us.

DL: I just showed an example but the point I wanted to make was the resources in terms of knowledge, as a form of inspiration for other practices.

Q1: First of all I would like to thank the panellists for bringing all those beautiful ideas and interesting project to us today. My name is Mark, I am a visual artist, I have worked in many different disciplines for a dance company for several years. Right now we are doing a collaboration at a bamboo theatre in Sai Kung, which is on until tomorrow. The reason that we are doing this project is to try to bring the general public into the art world

through cultural heritage. So my question is whether there would be any particular reasons in general for all the artists or art organisations that are here today to do these things, is there a direction concerned with contemporary issues or any environmental concern?

HN: I am not sure I quite understood the question but if it as to why we work in a way where there is collaboration or we are trying to bring people in by working with others, just answering for myself, it is because that is the only way we can work. It is about resources and creativity, it's about what people have to bring and I can only speak for myself, so for me, as a curator or somebody who is trying to work with artists who help to realize something, to me this is a process where I also don't know what the result is, and I am curious. So, collaborations for me are also a direct result of a curiosity and trying to address that. Whether that is through the audience or through another institution or through artists.

Q2: I wanted to ask about the idea of the artist village. It is an historical notion, and also the idea of the land as an almost micro-geography with open borders, but it has borders in the sense that it produces its own economy, its own ethics, its own relationships. It is like a parallel economy, although it reproduces ways of the actual. I just want to ask about this. It may grow, obviously, I am sure you are thinking of getting another patch of land, perhaps more houses...

RT: I think of it as an open source thing, and actually we try very hard not to programme it, in a way. The programming that goes on and what happens with this place is through the demand of the people who come to use it and that can go from the neighbouring farmer who comes in and works with us, or... there is a kind of laboratory aspect to it in that way. Generally it is always based on people who are engaging with it. So people come... bicyclists from Denmark who show up from a road trip across the world and they ended up at The Land for some reason, and of course they camped out for a week and ate the fruit from the trees and things like that, and that happens. So in a way I feel it is a little bit more open in the sense that there isn't a time dimension or a limitation to the time aspect of it. It is always capable of being there, so engagement is very different, in terms of time, from the relationship to the space in Bangkok which purposefully tries to engage with the economy.

I think also, in the other sense, two people started it with the ideas of many other people, and then we, in a sense, we have offered it to the people we are close to, to engage with it. Since then it has expanded, and in that sense we are continuously just trying to keep the platform open, and hopefully, at some point, other people will take it over. Then, I think, that aspect of it will change completely in terms of the ideas, or the original impetus to make such a place.

HN: Are there any rules? Are there things that you can and can't do?

DL: There are no rules in that kind of sense, but we are always saying that it's not an art space, because people think it's like a sculpture park, or an art park. I would say if there was a kind of rule it would be basically saying that we would like everything to work in a living way, so that's a kind of basic premise for it. So if you made a house, of course you could live in it or use it, you know. Or if you made a chair you could actually sit on it and not just something... it's not a prop.

Q3 (Charles Merewether): I just wanted to raise a question, without making the comparison too extreme, but the kind of distinction seemed to me to be a productive distinction, certainly in a way in which it might be characterized, between what Hammad was saying and what Frances was saying. A sense in which, what seems to me so critical here in the discussion, is the question of agency. If you take agency, in some way the discussion about the Partition, it seems to me, the working of the artist with collections in which to generate or produce work, and then on the other side the actual production of work with the engagement of the general public, which then becomes part of the collection; they are almost opposite in some ways. And I wonder whether there are not some problems on either side of those in terms of the kinds of limits... what are the gains and what are the shortcomings? On the one hand it seems to be the issue about the Partition is how do you get out to a larger public? It is shown in the galleries, and I understand that, but how does it begin to break down the sorts of divisions where so many people know nothing about the Partition, and where they can begin to understand it at a comparative level, if not an historical one. And then on the other side there is the Tate project, which seems a wonderful project in so far as thinking about the role of the museum in terms of the agency of production, of allowing artists in some way, but on the other hand... if it is an exercise which is about that then it seems fine. If it is a way of dealing with the limits of this idea of the physical collection then that seems to me to have certain real limits on it. It seems to me that it is still about being the production of an archive, which ends up in a collection. That's maybe to push it too far, but just in terms of the panel, it seems to me that here we have an issue of agency, and the issue on the one hand of artists, if you will, and the issue on the other hand of the institution, and how they collaborate.

FM: I think the archiving role of a museum, which in a way there is an almost pejorative tone in which you talk about it, is really an incredibly important one. I thought it was interesting that you were talking about your project that you made with people's memories that you sent the material back. It seems like the coming together of important material and then it returns to its owners and I rather like that idea. But I think there is a place and a role for the institution to collect history or collect 'stuff' that people in the future will reconsider as historical work. In a way museum curators do fulfil that role, particularly now, I mean fifty years ago museum curators were much more archivists than they are now, because we are actively involved in commissioning new work, and the two sit awkwardly, and I think what is crucial is that the museum should not just archive its

own history. Certainly when I have made projects I have never thought of them as projects that would end up in the museum, they are kind of separate things. Occasionally, they do end up in the museum. But just that archival thing, and we talked earlier about the old fashioned museum title was not curator but keeper, and there is that idea of a keeper of history, safeguarding stuff from loss, keeping it alive so it doesn't become extinct. In a way I am an art historian so I am re-writing history all the time but I am quite aware that the people following me will completely re-write the histories that we are engaged in writing at the moment. In a way it is the re-writing, it is the living bit of a museum where the archiving is incredibly important.

VK: You mentioned the word 'document' several times as opposed to the work itself, but at the same time you are acquiring the work. I just wanted to ask whether you've acquired work recently, a performance, by artists who have passed away?

FM: Yes, we have.

Q4: And how did you deal with that? How does one deal with that?

FM: Well I think that there are no simple answers or simple guidelines about how you deal with performance work by an artist who can no longer be there to choreograph the performance, and all one can do, as a curator, is try to evolve in collaboration with other people engaged in the same projects, conventions and agreed methodologies so that when you're looking at the work or engaging with it you're absolutely clear about what you're looking at, so it's about being completely transparent. It's not necessarily, I think, about saying "this black and white photograph of Chris Burden shooting himself in 1971". You say what it is, I don't think you need to say whether it is the work of art or whether the performance was, but you need to be very clear about what the material is. So, those living works or collaborative works continue to exist in a number of different guises; there might be photographs of them, instructions for them, there might be films of them happening, or there might be re-enactments and each is a different set of unique circumstances.

HN: I heard two points in Charles' question. Firstly it was about this issue of, the problematics of an artist responding to art, would they have done that throughout history? I would question why you would have a special question about an artist responding to art residing in a museum versus the artist using the resource as the sort of thing that Davaruth was talking about, in terms of the everyday. These are resource materials that are surely legitimate for artists to use in whatever way. The second point about how you get Jo Public to know about the Partition, I think is obviously a bigger point and it is a question of time. One of the things that we were seeking to do, and that we were trying to do in virtually all our projects is to try and inject – and sometimes we don't succeed – but

we try to inject whatever sort of knowledge comes out of it in some form into something bigger than us, which isn't very difficult because virtually everything is bigger than us. For us, the holy grail is when one essay on a catalogue which we produced becomes part of the UCLA art history reader. That means that people who are then going to come across us, who hadn't heard about Pakistan until two months ago will now suddenly be forced to confront something, which they will google and they will find something out. And if there is only one person who does that and then something else, to me I'm happy. I'd be happier if there were a thousand people but even if there is one then I am happier than I am now. That's what we are trying to do and, in a way, that's what archives and publications can hope to do, just to push it a little bit further and then that will hopefully set the platform for something bigger.

VK: I think we are just going to bring this to a close, if there are no more questions. This is kind of critical for me, especially the museum focus part, in the sense that, to put it in a most crude way, shit is happening everywhere in the world, all the time at the moment. There are some dream institutions around and I think that Reyum is one of them. I can count so many off-centre institutions that are doing fantastic work. A lot of them don't even think of archiving. They're performativity, as they're going along which I think is a huge kind of problem. Daravuth is not publishing in English anymore – this is a disaster, it is not going to be accessible to the rest of the world, this history as it is happening. I think this is losing common cultural history, from big to small to medium, this is radical, you know.

DL: It's not our choice, it's a lack of resources.

VK: Exactly. That is the situation and there are still places in what we call the centre, not off-centre places, where not only do they produce the history, they write the history, they criticize it and mediate it. So there is this kind of closed system that is still complicated for off-centre institutions and contexts to deal with. Just two days ago we were watching an extremely exciting documentary, for which there is almost no original material around. So what we have to deal with are memories of people in the way they want to remember the past, as opposed to having some access to the physical thing, that little photograph lying around somewhere, the silly drawing that was made, a conversation between the artists themselves, a book that was read with things that have been underlined. That is the real thing because everything is ephemera at the end of the day, it's all ephemeral, it all disappears, it goes into thin air and then you have an institution like Efflux, for example, describing the good, writing about the good, criticizing the good, and controlling the intellectual space by good will or bad will, or whatever, so I don't want to narrow it down to the fact of the fragility of these practices of participation, collaboration and the everyday, because the whole field is, in fact, fragile. The documentation of that, the passing of that onto the future, the fact that you have something to show what was going on; hey, Japan was going on before it was going on in New York, you know, Brazil was going on, Sao Paulo was going on before it was happening in Paris. We know that the

world is actually upside down in many different ways and things come before in certain places, for many reasons and because of the lack of archives and critical discussion around, they just disappear only to be discovered sixty or seventy years later, and then there has to be a rectification to history, but I think that is something to keep in mind. I think what the Asia Art Archive is doing at this moment is exactly that – laying the groundwork, laying the memory work for the future.

Thanks.