



## ART IN THE 22nd CENTURY

*In the increasingly globalized, interconnected, and technically accelerated future, art might be anything, collecting will be easier, and museums might provide a place for 'new forms of slowness'*

**BY WILLIAM HANLEY**



TOP Olafur Eliasson's site-specific, interactive *One-way colour tunnel*, 2007, for SFMOMA, changes hue depending on visitors' positions.  
BOTTOM Tobias Putrih's neon-light-emitting *Cylinder*, 2007, is architecture and sculpture that illuminates space.





**F**or almost three years Hans Ulrich Obrist, the vanguard curator and director of international projects at London's Serpentine Gallery, has been collecting ideas about the future. Beginning with close friends and then broadening his project to include five generations of people from all over the world, he has now asked some 90 artists what they think the future will look like. His list of responses, which hung in his office for a time, encompasses everything from Rirkrit Tiravanija's "The future will be chrome" to abstract prophesies like Liam Gillick's "The future will be layered and inconsistent" to menacing provocations on the order of Allora & Calzadilla's "In the future . . . the earth as a weapon."

More than a decade into the Internet era, it is no surprise that a good number of Obrist's forward-looking artists predict a future of accelerated connectivity. While ten years ago they might have forecast immersive virtual reality, today, in the age of YouTube and Facebook, a different vision has emerged, one in which people are ever more closely linked by travel and digital communication. The future is looking less like a computer-generated fantasy world than a speeded-up series of interpersonal connections. As the painter Sarah Morris more poetically put it, "The future is a knowing exchange of glances."

Those growing connections may represent the most significant development driving the future of the art world. With faster

**Rafael Lozano-Hemmer takes his immaterial art public. *Underscan: Relational Architecture 11, 2005, consists of "video-portraits" taken in England and projected in town squares.***

communications, physical distances in effect shrink, creating a more unified global art market. And as formerly physical commodities follow the path that music has taken—shifting from vinyl, store-bought LP to a freely exchanged digital file—it will become more important to trade images and ideas than to create objects. This will change the kind of work artists make and link art more closely to enter-

tainment. As a result, institutions will need to develop new strategies to steward the work of the future and stay relevant in the eyes of audiences.

To speak about globalization in the art market is almost a cliché, but it does have a solid foundation in fact. Communication among artists, dealers, collectors, and museums worldwide has become more immediate than ever in the last decade. The development has had a remarkable effect on the art market, linking dealers in Beijing to collectors in Bern and spawning the international exhibitions and art fairs that have transformed the art world into a movable feast.

Simon de Pury, chairman of auction house Phillips de Pury & Company, predicts that "the phenomenon of globalization will accentuate itself." The growing availability on the Web of information to which only insiders and specialists were once

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privity will, he believes, attract new and more numerous collectors to the market. "The Internet will continue to make collecting much, much easier," he says. "In the future, most of the world's collections will be fully documented and fully listed on the Internet, and anybody will be able to have access to data on any work that is of interest."

De Pury foresees that this improved access will entice peo-



ple from all over the world to begin collecting art, and that they will be collecting across a wider spectrum—from ancient Latin American to Russian contemporary art. In fact, he is counting on the early stages of this transformation allowing the art market to ride out the U.S. mortgage crisis.

It is not only the biggest players who are envisioning the benefits of globalization. At least one prominent dealer sees the same forces creating an ever-more decentralized art world, where it will be increasingly possible for a start-up gallery to operate in multiple locations on multiple continents without maintaining a large and expensive space in a traditional hub such as New York or London.

"As cheesy as it sounds, the Internet is still the issue," says art dealer Javier Peres, who represents assume vivid astro focus, Dan Colen, Terence Koh, and several other artists known for their rapid rise to fame. "It speeds everything up."

After founding his first gallery, Peres Projects, in San Francisco in 2002 (he later moved to Los Angeles), Peres established a second location in Berlin in 2004; he maintained smaller project spaces in New York and Athens. He attributes the success of his far-flung enterprise to a collector base accustomed to traveling to see work at art fairs—Peres has brought his artists to as many as seven a year—and doing business electronically. "The accumulation of these factors has changed the need to be in one place or another," says Peres. "You are going to see galleries doing really great shows in really random places more than ever."

While most agree that the interconnectedness of the art world will continue to increase, not everyone believes that this

is a positive development. At the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, curator Chrissie Iles refers to the "Starbucks-ification" of the art world—whereby the same works by a small group of trendy artists appear in exhibitions and fairs from Shanghai to New York to London—as a symptom of an "entertainment age" that shows no signs of passing. "We will find that there are a lot more diverse collections that,

paradoxically, tell a much more homogeneous story," she says. "Everyone will have that Warhol, that Sol LeWitt."

For Iles, the postmodern penchant for revisiting the styles of the past, which began in the 1970s, has intensified with the emergence of new means of exchanging information. "There's a really

**Terence Koh's  
uncontainable  
alchemy is at play in  
*Untitled*, 2007, made  
of light, lead, and a  
ball of string.**

intense recycling going on," she says. "We're getting copies of copies of copies of copies, and you wonder why these artists can't do something original, create their own *Spiral Jetty*." She adds, "It's hard to imagine what someone who thinks MySpace is interesting will morph into in 20 years' time," she said.

Madeleine Grynsztejn, senior curator of painting and sculpture at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, has a few ideas about what that future might look like. She foresees the commercial success of user-generated Web content that fuels sites such as MySpace creating a seamless convergence of art, entertainment, and commerce. As concepts, images, and ideas continue to replace physical products, artists will find themselves at the center of a new culture industry and in a privileged place from which to question it.

In Grynsztejn's estimation, the result will be new variations on participatory work that engages the viewer. She recently curated a midcareer survey of Olafur Eliasson, whom she sees as an early practitioner of this trend, but insists that a new kind of interactive art will become increasingly common. It may use the same electronic media that have been bringing about the synthesis of art and entertainment, or it may react against them with lower-tech materials. Either way, Grynsztejn says, it will be as participatory as the user-generated commercial sphere from which it is emerging.

Alanna Heiss, founder and director of New York's P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, forecasts that entertainment and art will converge on-screen. As soon as ten years from now, she speculates, film and video art will have a much closer relationship with the commercial film industry. According to Heiss, curators will become more like studio heads, selecting projects to produce, while gallerists will evolve into the equivalent of Hollywood agents, seeking projects for their stables of talent.

The electronic sharing of images, predicts Heiss, will eventually lead to a "crisis of the multiple," in which the uniqueness of artworks will need to be reevaluated. "The innumerable



quantities of YouTube will be the only numbers that make sense," she says.

Though Heiss is uncertain of how this crisis will play out, she sees museums taking a lead role in filtering content for viewers in the same way that they currently collect work and select it for exhibition. She suggests that a Hollywood film company head would be involved in making programming decisions that affect the uniqueness of a work by saying, "We're only going to show 100 of these per day."

What this evolution toward the innumerable and immaterial would mean for brick-and-mortar institutions is unclear, but Terence Riley, director of the Miami Art Museum and former architecture and design curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, believes that emerging media will have a profound impact on the way museums are constructed.

"Right now you have a lot of really unhappy video galleries that are just painting galleries with the lights off," he says, adding that architects would do well to start asking, "Is that really what a video gallery could be or should be?"

"From installations with more-complex spatial features to things with more-complex technological requirements, all this needs to come together in a building that in and of itself is also inspiring artwork," he says. "Art is becoming a lot more complicated than it used to be, and architects are going to have a lot more responsibility in that sense."

Riley is overseeing the construction of a new building for MAM, and no matter how the nature of the work on view may change, he expects the current vogue for creating landmark museum facilities to continue. Art that has been collected during the recent market boom, including video and other on-screen work, will be finding its way into museums—both public and private.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, too, is also gearing up for an expansion. Still in the early planning stages, the

**In Liam Gillick's  
Quarter Scale Model of  
a Social Structure for a  
Plaza in Guadalajara,  
2005, we see the future  
in community life.**

new building will house the museum's collection of modern and contemporary art as well as rotating special exhibitions; director Peter Marzio has been trying to keep the needs of emerging mediums in mind as the groundwork is laid for the exhibition spaces. "The whole idea of doing a 'building' for the contemporary art of the future may be an anachronism," he says, noting that art as a material object may soon be an outmoded concept. "Maybe the art is outside, or maybe it's in the air, or maybe it just lives on people's screens or on a server somewhere."

But tailoring exhibition spaces to the art of the future may be a small challenge compared with that of adapting the entire institution to the changing expectations of audiences, says Marzio. "It's very difficult for someone raised with the Internet

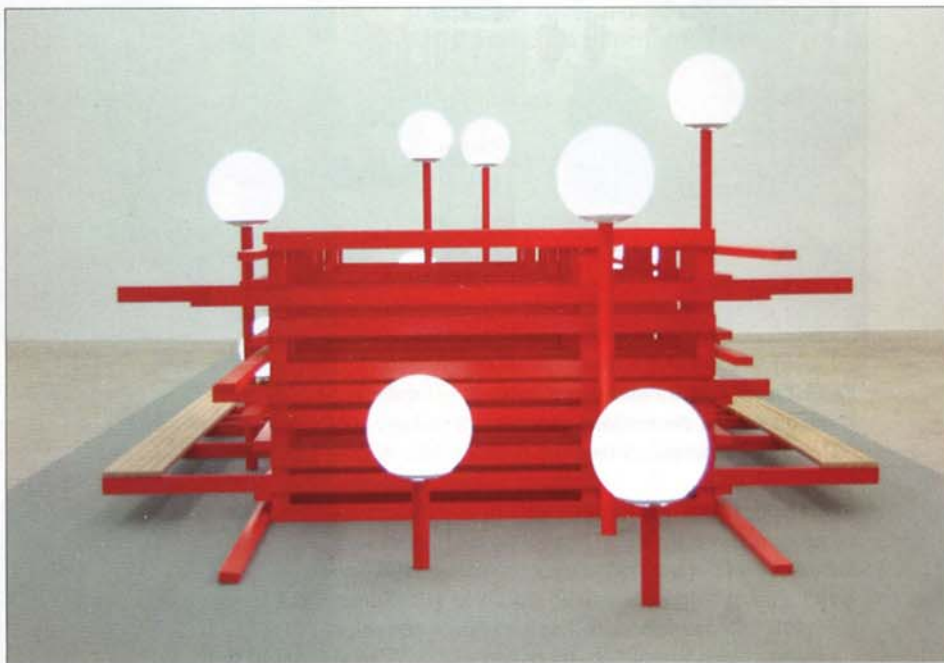
to stand and look at a picture that doesn't move," he explains.

Marzio anticipates that as audiences come to expect art experiences to happen predominantly on-screen in their homes or on-site in immersive installations, art museums will undergo a shift in focus analogous to that of science museums. In the 19th century, when the sciences focused on exploring and documenting the natural world, natural-history museums were domestic repositories for the leading edge of global research, but in the 20th century, as the sciences became more abstract and theoretical, the museums had to create a new role for themselves. "They became places of virtual activity, like big audiovisual education machines, with a lot of entertainment as well," says Marzio. Original objects were in many cases replaced by learning games and experience.

This trend has already led to a decline in rigorous Old Master exhibitions, and Marzio expects that today's touring blockbuster shows will also fail to draw crowds further down the line. Still, he holds out some hope for traditional mediums and the institutions that conserve them. In the distant future, he sees the possibility of artists reacting against the speed and immediacy of electronic media by returning to painting and sculpture. Museums will be spaces where that can take place.

"Museums can be a counterbalance to some of the things that are going on," Marzio says. But he adds, "I'm sure the horse and buggy was counterbalance to the Model A Ford for a long time, as well."

Back at the Serpentine Gallery, Obrist concurs. He sees museums becoming more important forces in the art world of the



future because, in an age of instant communication, they can provide a place for artists to explore "new forms of slowness" through work that rewards focused contemplation. He predicts a return to sculpture and other traditional mediums, but he insists that to truly understand the future of the art world, one has to ask the artists. That is why he plans to continue his list, even if, according to photographer and video artist Martha Rosler, "The future always flies under the radar." ■