

Sugerencias al MAC para su nueva dirección o transición

Sugerencias de Lisa Ladner (investigadora, productora y comunicadora cultural en y de Suiza y Puerto Rico, fundadora de el-status.com) para la publicación en www.dondeveoarte.com/situacion-mac.html.

I think it's too early to talk about who could replace Mrs. Somoza. How about first analyzing the present situation? Then the mission needs to be revised, a new concept developed and then an adequate team has to be built.

In my opinion only these four facts are "holy":

- 1) The institution was named Museo de Arte Contemporáneo 24 years ago and should not change its name.
- 2) The MAC was founded mainly by artists with the vision of offering a space for multidisciplinary experiences in all facets of contemporary art. Let's go back to this vision.
- 3) According to its statutes, its collection belongs to the people of Puerto Rico. Which doesn't mean that the collection can not be changed, sold or sent out to travel the world.
- 4) The MAC is located in the Labra building in Santurce. This is not an easy but also not a bad premise.

The MAC now offers (or used to offer): a collection (the core being paintings from post World War II to 1990), exhibitions, preservation, documentation, education (guided tours, school programs, workshops and seminars), a shop, publications (books, catalogues and videos), indoors and outdoors space (for rent), services (multimedia productions, art restoration) and an emergency fund for artists.

These existing offers need to be evaluated bearing two main questions in mind:

- 1) Do they support the mission?
Current mission see www.museocontemporaneopr.org/sobreelmuseo_mision.htm.
- 2) Can the MAC afford them?

In my opinion, the present concept and mission need to be radically changed. Again: before this is done, it makes no sense to evaluate a new director or a new curator. Maybe in the future mission statement "educating the people" will be substituted by "creating awareness for contemporary problems" and "collect and diffuse art produced in Puerto Rico, the Caribbean and Latin America from the 1940s on" will make place for "focus on exhibiting art produced in the last 20 years but showing also older works if they directly contribute to shedding light on nowadays problems".

In October 2007 I attended an international conference in Germany entitled "Where is Art Contemporary? The Global Challenge of Art Museums". Museum directors from Asia and Africa, curators and scholars from Belgium, Germany, New York, the Philippines and the Middle East agreed that contemporary art museums are forced to constantly discuss their definition of contemporary art and adjust the mission of their museums if they want to survive. Some thought that "contemporaneity" and "museum" already is a contradiction and that contemporary art can only live outside of institutions. Mrs. Somoza by the way supported my trip to the conference with \$ 200 and allowed me to present myself as a representative of the MAC as which I managed to establish some interesting contacts.

The MAC has always struggled with financial problems. Do we have any reason to believe that by changing the director these problems will stop? I doubt it. Rather the MAC should find a concept that works with little money and extend its program - if more money should start to come in. For three years I've been maintaining www.el-status.com with zero funding. The 2008 "Pulguero de los Artistas" cost Carmelo Sobrino and me \$ 2,000 (which we managed to cover), the "FAS 08 -

Feria de Arte Sonoro" cost me \$ 3,000 (of which about half was covered). Of course these are self-exploiting projects (I didn't pay myself a salary) and projects that can not be compared with running a museum. But it illustrates that a good idea costs nothing and the realization can be done with a low budget and still have an impact.

According to the ICOM, a museum is "a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment." (<http://icom.museum/statutes.html>)

Given the size of Puerto Rico and the economic and political situation I'd vote for a holistic approach to this definition. How about seeing all of Puerto Rico's art institutions as "one museum" of which the MAC is the most vanguard and experimental department? Then maybe it would NOT need its own collection (leave this to the ICP and the MAPR) nor a Centro de Documentación (leave this to the universities, the art school libraries and the ICP). It would NOT have to run a shop (the book stores and souvenir shops do it better) or spend time and money on finding members and keeping them happy. **It could simply concentrate on doing great exhibitions based on research and accompanied by publications that would be distributed world-wide. Shows that would have an impact on the Puerto Rican society and attract art lovers from far and near and thus also sponsors and international partners.**

Ever since I've been studying the MAC (the doctoral thesis I'm working on is entitled "Curating Puerto Rico. Exhibiting Contemporary Art in the post-colonial colony, 1998-2008") I thought that it should be co-directed by two people: one in charge of administration and finances and one in charge of artistic and curatorial decisions. Together they would take strategic decisions (mission, collaborations and partnerships). Instead of contracting beginners who are willing to work for "nothing" the staff should be small but equipped with the best people available on or outside the island. Without knowing the members and history of the present board, I'm under the impression that it's time for them to make space for a more committed group which they could help to appoint.

Enough said. Good luck to the present and future MAC and all the people involved!

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Your comments are welcome: info@lisaladner.com