

2022

28 november

First European  
Assembly  
of Contemporary  
Art Centres

*This Time  
We Talk About  
Gender*

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DCA

French National  
Network of Contemporary  
Art Centres

# First European Assembly of Contemporary Art Centres

Closing event at the Carreau du Temple, Paris

Summary of the roundtable on **28 november**

This document produced by DCA is a summary of the discussions held during a round-table in Paris on November 28, 2022 in the framework of the First European Assembly of Contemporary Art Centres.

The video recordings of the previous discussions are available on: <https://europeanartassembly.org/en>

With:

Sepake Angiama, Artistic Director of the Institute for International Visual Arts (Iniva) in London.

Antonio Cataldo, Artistic Director of Fotogalleriet in Oslo, Steering Committee Member of the European Assembly of Contemporary Art Centres.

Agnès Saal, Senior Equality and Diversity Officer at the Ministry of Culture (France).

Ursula Schöndeling, Free curator, writer and artmediator, member of the board of ADKV Arbeitsgemeinschaft deutscher Kunstvereine.

Manuel Segade, Director of CA2M Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo in Madrid, Steering Committee Member of the European Assembly of Contemporary Art Centres.

Elfi Turpin, Director of the CRAC Alsace, Centre rhénan d'art contemporain, in Altkirch, Co-president of DCA the French national network for contemporary art centres, and Steering Committee Member of the European Assembly of Contemporary Art Centres.

Chaired by Géraldine Gourbe Philosopher, Art Critic and Curator, Professor at The TALM School of Art and Design in Angers.

### Elfi Turpin:

The first European Assembly of Contemporary Art Centres, organized by DCA – French national network of contemporary art centres, in collaboration with various art institutions in Europe, is now ending with a final roundtable discussion. Our aim was to address gender inequalities and question the different forms of discrimination we experience in our daily lives. Two previous projects organized by DCA proved to be foundational and generated fruitful artistic exchanges: *Thermostat*<sup>1</sup> in 2010 and 2011, a programming exchange project among art centres in France and the Kunstvereine in Germany; the Franco-Italian artistic cooperation platform *Piano*<sup>2</sup>, developed in 2014 and 2015.

Out of a mutual recognition of our values and concerns, we developed a desire to “make” an assembly, to initiate a series of regular public debates, sharing, and exchanges on our artistic practices and issues. The goal was to encourage collective reflection on the social and environmental responsibilities that artistic institutions must assume every day in carrying out their missions. We first noticed that the teams of contemporary art centres are overwhelmingly composed of women, and this crushing majority becomes even more significant as the institution’s budget decreased.

This first European assembly therefore intended to identify the underlying structural and material conditions perpetuating these inequalities within the artistic ecosystem. We aimed to share ideas, tools, methodologies, and transformative actions that can help combat multiple forms of discrimination and develop new practices. For this purpose, we invited twenty art professionals, artists, educators, curators, directors of institutions, critics, and researchers to participate in discussions and share their insights and inspirations.

### Agnès Saal:

Women in the cultural sector have long been denied opportunities that their talents, skills, and expertise warranted. For nearly four years, the French Ministry of Culture has implemented an inclusive policy promoting equality across all sectors through a diverse range of tools. Françoise Nyssen initiated a “Feuille de route Égalité” [Equality Roadmap], which we have updated annually. Our actions have taken shape in different ways, including an appointment policy. However, beyond the number of women nominated to lead institutions, we must look at the budgets, resources, and ways to enable women to access institutions with the same means as those run by men. For the past 13 years, there has been an “Observatoire de l’égalité” [Observatory of Equality] in the field of culture and communication<sup>3</sup> – observing, counting, and enumerating is essential. This document not only helps us to quantify gender disparities, but also assesses changes over time... Or rather, at least until 2018-2019, we recorded a persistent lack of women in several cultural and artistic fields. Therefore, we must ensure equal access to resources for creating, disseminating, and producing.

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1 <https://dca-art.com/en/actions/thermostat>

2 <https://dca-art.com/en/actions/piano>

3 <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Thematiques/Etudes-et-statistiques/Publications/Collections-d-ouvrages/Observatoire-de-l-egalite-entre-femmes-et-hommes-dans-la-culture-et-la-communication/Observatoire-2022-de-l-egalite-entre-femmes-et-hommes-dans-la-culture-et-la-communication>

We have been working very hard to move forward in the fight against sexist and sexual violence and harassment; this violence is a daily reality in all cultural sectors as well as in art schools. The ministère de la Culture has implemented a range of measures<sup>4</sup>, including a radical and ground-breaking tool – conditioning support on the effective adoption of tools against this violence, ensuring that structures that fail to address this issue do not receive financial support.

We also launched *Elles font la photographie*, an online resource platform, as part of a broader initiative entitled *Elles font la culture*<sup>5</sup>. It is intended to be gradually extended to other sectors of the visual arts, theatre, cinema, architecture, and music. It provides access to resources on financial support available in the photography field, on how to pitch a project or negotiate a contract. Webinars are also being organized.

In the framework of a working group initiated by the CNPAV<sup>6</sup> on issues of parenthood and the status of the artist, some recommendations have been proposed and should, I hope, be implemented by the DGCA<sup>7</sup> if possible. In parallel, we are going to undertake the “diversity” worksite, a catch-all term dealing with the other criteria of discrimination, in the visual arts as elsewhere.

#### Géraldine Gourbe:

When I defended my thesis at the university some fifteen years ago, it was very challenging to come up with a feminist, gender, or queer argument without facing a defensive attitude implying it was not based on the production of universal knowledge, and therefore not scientifically credible. We had to spend a lot of time and use many tactics to demonstrate our robust epistemology and sound methodology. However, we have now progressed beyond this point and can take up topics further than the question of the “feminine” and move towards questions of practice. We can ask ourselves how gender studies and ableist criticism can impact our relationships, theories, and practices within the art field, offering new perspectives and uses.

I think that for DCA, it was essential not to organise one event that drives out another, but rather to pool narratives of experience, to carefully reactivate what has been gathered and transcribed. At the network level, these reflections have been ongoing since a professional gathering held in 2016 at Centre International d’Art et du Paysage de l’île de Vassivière<sup>8</sup>. The discussion on work-related suffering extended beyond simple testimony, seeking the reasons and circumstances, transforming it into a form of self-criticism. The strain on raw resources is often discussed, particularly in the capitalocene era. However, little attention is paid to how our own resting times, idle times,


4 <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Demarches-en-ligne/Par-type-de-demarche/Declaration-renouvellement/Lutte-contre-les-VHSS-violences-et-harcelement-sexistes-et-sexuels-dans-le-spectacle-vivant-et-les-arts-visuels>

5 <https://ellesfontlaculture.beta.gouv.fr/>

6 <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Presse/Communiqués-de-presse/Creation-du-conseil-national-des-professions-des-arts-visuels-CNPAV>

7 <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Nous-connaitre/Organisation-du-ministere/La-direction-generale-de-la-creation-artistique>

8 <https://www.ciapiledevassiviere.com/home>



social times, are themselves being subjected to ecocidal appropriation. It is essential to create temporal pauses, and how necessary this is to share cartographies with others: this is what Elfi Turpin calls instituent practices, or what I refer to, as an ex-Marxist, an “assembly-line labour”. During the previous four online meetings, we asked ourselves how to make art differently without relying on conventional tools, formats, and gimmicks. We discussed how education, pedagogy, and public outreach in art industry, could move away from a hierarchical relationship with curatorial programming. We examined how a dis-patriarchal approach with the public and their participation in institutions could challenge a feeling of repeated and entrenched “reverence” within our practices. We explored how to address the question of repetition, of social habits, as Vanessa Desclaux and Émilie Renard did a few years ago in their programme *Tes mains dans mes chaussures*<sup>9</sup> at La Galerie in Noisy-le-Sec.

Finally, we questioned our uses of language as a performative process, in its capacity not to speak “truths” or reproduce “essentializing principles”, but to generate actions against the powerful capitalist, patriarchal, racist and ableist apparatus that endlessly erases our instituent practices and their transmissions. Thus, it is necessary to build pathways with what has been done and theorized for the creation of a new form of vision, of belief.

#### Sepake Angiama:

When I think about the institution I work for, the Institute for International Visual Arts<sup>10</sup>, the work I have done within critical radical pedagogy or my thinking surrounding feminist science fictions, I recognise that this is the work that challenges the ways in which we have been taught and in which we learn. When INIVA was set up in 1994 by the Arts Council it was necessary and important to consider what an institute that recognises non-European discourses in the visual arts could look like. The 80s and early 90s were a very significant moment because of those who were coming through as “Windrush Generation”, meaning those who would have come from other parts of what was then the British Empire: the Caribbean, Asia, Africa. It is important to recognize that people coming from these different geographies read and understood themselves as British subjects, as well as to understand the schism that then existed when faced with racism in the UK. Their education was that which was taught in Britain; it wasn’t the geography or history, strangely, of the places where they were from. This notion of the UK as a motherland and at same time being an “other land” created these notions of duality and hybridity. The work of those studying in art schools in Britain was therefore not necessarily understood by a wider public. What kind of institution could be built to recognize these different geographies, epistemologies, etymologies?

Cultural theorist, sociologist and educator Stuart Hall showed that people’s narratives and geographies might be reiterated in their work and pointed to the fact that subjective identity was not necessarily more formally understood. The work of the institution has led to a much broader understanding of how cultural identity, hybridity, and duality may create the conditions for which an artist might wish to respond, politically, socially, and otherwise. It has helped artists to enter the mainstream, to define and find a voice that not only speaks to the wider art world but also recognises the importance of what it means to speak within your community.

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9 <http://archive.lagalerie-cac-noisylesec.fr/saisons/tes-mains-dans-mes-chaussures/>

10 <https://iniva.org/>

Museum education is often taken up by women in the UK, who have to find alternative avenues to gain access into a domain composed mostly of men. I think the importance of the work of radical pedagogy and radical education is to be critical of the temples of art; that tension is important for us to be progressive within society. If we instead say, as institutions: “yes we are racist, ableist and sexist”, then we would be able to accept that we need to change. If we think that we are not, then potentially, nothing changes. When thinking about who can enter the hallowed space of the exhibition, I was fighting for forms of representation for women and people of color. What I recognized is that within that fight, I hadn’t also recognized neurodiversity. Museums and galleries often see working with neurodivergent artists as belonging to the realm of education: what about instead our exhibition spaces recognizing these artists? We need to think in a much more expansive way, about how we can shift our mindset so that the institution can in turn shift its mindset.

### Manuel Segade:

People sometimes point out that CA2M Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo has a feminist agenda, but it is precisely because it is a contemporary art institution that it works closely with communities, various audiences, and minority groups within our environment. Contemporary art emerged in the 1960s as a linguistic and aesthetic paradigm shift closely tied to the social changes of the time: contemporary art bears intersectional critique in its DNA; it is composed of subjects rather than objects, even down to the museum collection reserves.

Eight years ago, a group of older women started knitting in the art centre café, which operates as a private business within the public space. This led to a conflict: they were apparently spending too much time there without purchasing enough. So, we decided to buy a large table in the café, with the following sign: “This table is reserved primarily for the knitting women of Móstoles”. Our dialogue continued, and they created the association *Tejiendo Móstoles*. They organise feminist actions against gender-based violence and use the art centre as an institutional platform to obtain wool and textiles to knit blankets for the city’s migrants and homeless people. With their *Hamacódromo* action, an installation of handmade hammocks in the public space, which we supported, they claimed the right to idleness.

This kind of gesture in support of initiatives simply in need of space, time, guidance, and emotional support is not so much for a large institution, but creates a permeable, fuzzy institutionality that is not codified.

### Antonio Cataldo:

The First European Assembly has been concurrent to my directorship at Fotogalleriet<sup>11</sup> and greatly informed the practices and habits that we have come to implement on a structural and institutional level, as well as on the board of Kunsthalls in Norway<sup>12</sup>. In parallel to the discussions, Fotogalleriet has restructured its board, with permanent positions for diversity. We have established a curatorial fellowship implemented as a 12 month fully paid

11 <https://fotogalleriet.no/no/>

12 <https://kunsthalleneinorge.no/en/frontpage/>

position, for a person who would not have otherwise persevered a career or would not have been able to pursue a career in the arts, as well as a youth council who we worked with on redesigning our identity beyond our physical space. We have worked on exhibitions that have been curated by or in collaboration with organisations that have a social mandate that are working beyond the art field alone, such as with TrAP (Transcultural Arts Production)<sup>13</sup> on a project called *Keys to the City*<sup>14</sup> for temporary employment of people from less privileged backgrounds.

Feminist perspectives allow us to change the narratives of institutional spaces, because they point out a needed change to the people who have the power to speak. This is equally a matter of architecture which, as one of exhibition spaces' greatest tragedies, informs its habits. When we speak about education, however, we should be careful as art institutions to not also take on the burden, the task, of all the necessary work that should happen in schools to bring forward structural change.

Julia Morandeira, in her contribution on March 8th<sup>15</sup>, pointed to the prevalence of feminized work, which should be read as the invisibilisation of people laboring behind the exhibition spaces – people who are not given space at all because they're made not welcome or not taught that they would have room, or a career in the exhibition space. Actively discouraging narratives tell us that art is elitist, that you can't make it as an artist, that there is a separation between art and life, or that art is not a profession; these tropes feed into a certain fascism.

It is essential that art should be considered labor because it is only by viewing it as such, that it doesn't fall into the category of the hobby that is only available to privileged people. Time, not only space, is a luxury that most people cannot afford. Real access to our spaces requires a long-term self-investment with a precarious income, or no income at all, for consecutive years. Feminized work, I would add, should be evaluated through the lens of class. Since the turn of the 1990s there has been a great fear of the use of the term "class" in politics and theories, which is a significant failure of our time. Education acts as an emancipatory tool for counterbalancing the disadvantage of kids of lower classes. In order for structural change to happen and for art to be different, we must depart from early education.

#### Ursula Schöndeling:

The 300 Kunstvereine in Germany are not funded by the state but by the local communes, and sometimes not at all; they are above all supported by their members. Though this could sound empowering, the history of the Kunstvereine is rooted in elitist networks as well as narratives of the well-educated and the bourgeois, who view these institutions as instruments for creating a "civil society". This history, as well as its structure, become a difficulty when thinking about broader publics.

While many of the Kunstvereine are run by women, they were and are not endowed with a lot of money. During COVID, when there were millions to

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13 <https://trap.no/en/>

14 <https://fotogalleriet.no/learn/key-to-the-city-nokkel-til-byen/>

15 <https://europeanartassembly.org/en/programme/1>

distribute between people and between institutions, a battle of shares started that showed a growing individualism in the arts. What kind of solidarity are we finally going to have for each other? There is a social inequality that needs to be covered, and there is always a crisis to come and to fund. In Germany, we know we will get through 2023, but we can't know for 2024. No one that was running an institution during COVID had any time at all, because we were preoccupied with fundings. When we need to pay our team and when we want to address issues in education, we need to have the money to do so. We work on projects too much and need to have the tools and fundings to be able to work long-term. When you give people a place to work and endow them with money, it works wonderfully; you have to look at your local community and ask whether there are different groups or communities to approach.

#### Elfi Turpin:

Ursula, I understand you worked as a part-time director of the Kunstverein Langenhagen. This goes back to Antonio's question about solidarity: there is competition among women who lead Kunstvereine when it comes to calls for projects and eventually securing positions with better working conditions. In France, the CACIN label ("Centre d'art contemporain d'intérêt national" [Centre for contemporary art of national interest]) guides us in our missions and helps us protect our funding from public authorities. This allows us to work over longer periods of time, giving us the ability to develop programmes and actions over time.

We need to invest time differently, to find other rhythms that do not require constant and time-consuming calls for projects. The notion of reciprocity is extremely important in discussing action and transformation. This term, when use to talk about care, pertains to ways of being: how we listen to the artists we collaborate with, the audiences in all their differences and diversities we engage with, but also how we listen to their "hinterland". People come to the art centre with their hinterland and shape our practices. Over time, these practices transform the institution and gradually makes it more accessible, less discriminatory, and structurally resilient.



## Q&A with the audience

### Mikaela Assolent:

This morning, during a workshop bringing together the art centre teams in charge of the visitors' experience, we discussed the issue of urging audiences unfamiliar with art venues to participate, which can have discriminatory implications, as well as the pedagogies and approaches that we, as facilitators, can employ to counteract this. Art venues can be unintentionally exclusionary, especially due to the lack of diversity within the teams. We have identified cultural coordination as a research and practice that investigates ways to change the institution and overcome these tendencies. This concern is the responsibility of all individuals within the art centres.

This afternoon, as part of a cross-disciplinary workshop entitled "Struggles against structural racism, sexism, validism, classism in art centers: where are we?", we welcomed researcher and artist No Anger<sup>16</sup>, who expresses the power of her disabled body and thus highlights the social oppressions she experiences daily. No Anger explained how the imaginary produces social reality, which in turn produces the imaginary whereby ableism representations persist. She reminded us, it is not the bodies that are unable, but that they are made unable by their environment. We need to raise awareness about ableism rather than focusing solely on disability and supporting and inviting disabled artists rather than using art as a means of so-called "rehabilitation".

### Delphine Bedel:

As president of the Dutch-based foundation Engagement Arts NL<sup>17</sup>, I would like to draw attention to artists in exile, and especially women artists and mother artists who often arrive in extreme emergency situations. They are frequently invited for a very short period of one or two months, given a grant, but what happens afterwards? What other, more sustainable temporalities could institutions think of to support them beyond an invitation to exhibit?

### Sepake Angiama:

How can we think together and see our institutions as ecologies? We have to recognize that we can do so much as cultural centers, but at INIVA an ongoing question is who we need to think about partnering with. One of our partners is an art therapy center, because we don't hold all the expertise and we recognize that the work we do can bring up various kinds of trauma, for example when working with people who are exiled or migrants. In education we are not encouraged to develop our emotional literacy, and the way in which I think any cultural center should deal with questions of trauma or mental health is with a human response. It is also a matter of intersectionality, recognizing how one issue touches upon another. I think about this also in relation to questions of decoloniality; I think there is an element of continuity with what happens beyond the invitation. We have to recognize that the work is never done, and the archive acts as a score for the future.

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16 <https://amongstedefendant.wordpress.com/author/nonoelomb/>

17 <https://engagementarts.nl/>

Summary written by Eleni Pantelaras for DCA, 2023  
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Website and Visual Identity of the First European Assembly of Contemporary Art Centres  
Lorraine Furter in collaboration with Laurie Charles and Juliana Vargas Zapata