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## Are the Art World's 'Peripheries' Becoming the New Centers?

Western museums are expanding their acquisition strategies.

Nicola Trezzi (<https://news.artnet.com/about/nicola-trezzi-347>), June 29, 2016



Fabrica de Pensule, Cluj. Courtesy Fabrica de Pensule

In the Tate's announcement of [Frances Morris's appointment](https://news.artnet.com/people/frances-morris-director-tate-modern-408128) (<https://news.artnet.com/people/frances-morris-director-tate-modern-408128>) as the new director of the Tate Modern this past January, the museum—[whose new building has just opened](https://news.artnet.com/art-world/tate-modern-london-opening-518816) (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/tate-modern-london-opening-518816>)—highlighted the fact that Morris, until then the museum's director of collection of international art, has “been credited with promoting the Tate Modern's global profile” and “has shaped and developed Tate's international collection.”

“Global” and “international” are in fact key aspects of Tate Modern's collecting policy and related acquisition budget, and the institution has active acquisition committees in place for Africa, North America, Latin America, Asia Pacific, the Middle East and North Africa, Russia and Eastern Europe, and South Asia. Interestingly, Tate, a major institution in a country known for its strong national identity—[as demonstrated by Brexit](https://news.artnet.com/art-world/everything-you-need-to-know-about-brexit-526835) (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/everything-you-need-to-know-about-brexit-526835>)—is leading the way in terms of how museums understand, value, and display art by placing traditional centers and peripheries side by side.



The new Tate Modern, designed by Herzog & de Meuron. Courtesy of Tate Modern, Photo by ©Iwan Baan

The example of Tate Modern, whose collection rooms employ a unique anti-chronological structure in which works by British, Western, and non-Western artists are presented next to each other, is just the symptom of a greater shift that sees certain areas of the world becoming “peripheral centers.” In fact it comes as no surprise that one of the major partners in building the collection of the Tate is Outset (<http://www.outset.org.uk/>), which describes itself as “the only global, privately funded and independent philanthropic body constituted to support new art for the public good.” Founded in 2003 in London by Candida Gertler and Yana Peel, it has branches in England, Germany, Israel, India, The Netherlands, Greece, Scotland, and Estonia.

A similar example is The Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative (<https://www.guggenheim.org/map>) whose goal is to foster “cross-cultural interaction between artists, curators, and audiences via educational programs, online activities, and collection building” and focusing on three regions—South and Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa. With UBS’s support, the Guggenheim Foundation has hired three curators, for three regions—Singaporean June Yap, Mexican Pablo León de la Barra, and British-born Iranian Sara Raza—who traveled throughout their respective regions in order to buy works from local artists that would become part of the Guggenheim’s collection, and exhibited as thematic shows there (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/sara-raza-smuggles-inconvenient-truths-into-the-guggenheim-483251>). The exhibitions are to subsequently tour to institutions such as the Jumex Foundation in Mexico City and the CCA in Singapore.



Sara Raza, Guggenheim UBS MAP Curator, Middle East and North Africa.  
Photo: Courtesy of the Guggenheim.

But this shift in focus away from the traditional centers is also related to artists' own movements. While the 1990s saw the big cities attracting artists from all over the world—Maurizio Cattelan, Mariko Mori, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Shirin Neshat, Gabriel Orozco have all moved to New York, for example—the 2000s saw a the map of artistic hubs decentralizing: artists from Romania, Poland, Mexico, Czech Republic, Brazil, Indonesia—often protégés of the aforementioned artists (take Orozco, and his students Abraham Cruzvillegas, Daniel Guzmán, and Damián Ortega)—preferred to stay in their home countries, but without compromising their ability to exhibit in major museums. As a result, they arguably became even more appealing to such institutions precisely because of the integrity that such a position implies.

At the same time, the art community is increasingly moving away from discussions of nationality in favor of two parallel models: firstly, by looking at regions rather than nations; and secondly, at cities as art centers independent of the countries they're in. In these “central peripheries,” however, it's important to remember that because infrastructures are different, the roles—that of the artist, the critic, the curator, the gallery owner, the collector—as well as models such as commercial versus non-profit, private versus public, institutional versus alternative, are more fluid. Artist open galleries, private collections act as public museums, critics become agents, commercial galleries behave like art centers, and so on. (Though one could argue this fluidity is symptomatic of the art world at large).



Looking at Europe, three examples are deserving of mention: Fabrica de Pensule, founded in 2009 in Cluj-Napoca; Tranzitdisplay, founded in 2007 in Prague; and Foksal Gallery Foundation, founded in 1997 in Warsaw.



Fabrica de Pensule, Cluj. Courtesy Fabrica de Pensule

The epicenter of the vibrant scene in Transylvania, Fabrica de Pensule is a disused paintbrush factory now turned into a multifunctional building including artists studios, galleries—such as Plan b and Galeria Sabot—artist-run-spaces, as well as a theater, a performance venue, and a nightclub. Thanks to international starts like Ciprian Muresan and Adrian Ghenie, who both still live in Cluj, Fabrica de Pensule is often visited by curators and gallery owners and even Okwui Enwezor, while preparing his “Intense Proximity: La Triennale 2012” in Paris, came and selected young star Mihuş Boşcu Kafchin, who was the youngest artist in the show, as well as veteran Miklos Onucsan.

Tranzitdisplay is a unique situation, linking an artist-led-initiative and a corporate cultural venture. While Display was an artist-run-space initiated in 2001 by Tomáš Svoboda and Zbyněk Baladrán, Tranzit is sponsored by the Erste Bank; if Tranzit has branches in Vienna, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, its Czech branch is peculiar for its marriage with the artist-run Display, and for its leaders, curator Vít Havránek and artist Zbyněk Baladrán, who have become some of the most respected voices in contemporary art, especially through special projects such as “Report on the Construction of a Spaceship Module” presented at the New Museum, and through their roles in Tranzit’s curatorial project for Manifesta 8.



Adam Szymczyk was appointed Director of the 14th Documenta in 2013

Foksal Gallery Foundation takes its name from the historical Galeria Foksal and acts simultaneously as commercial gallery and art center, representing Polish stars such as Wilhelm Sasnal, Monika Sosnowska, and Jakub Julian Ziółkowski (all now represented also by the Swiss mega-gallery Hauser & Wirth) and doing special projects with foreign artists such as Yael Bartana and Lucy McKenzie. A real powerhouse in Poland and beyond, FGF has an amazing network behind it. While Andrzej Przywara—who worked at the original Foksal from 1988 to 2001 and then founded FGF with Joanna Mytkowska and Adam Szymczyk—still runs the place, Mytkowska went first to the Pompidou and now directs the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, while Szymczyk went first to Kusthalle Basel and is now directing the 2017 edition of Documenta.



Rirkrit Tiravanija, after Julius Koller, (2012) at kurimanzutto. Courtesy of kurimanzutto

Similar to Foksal is kurimanzutto, which was conceived as a nomadic space in the late 1990s by Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco together with Mónica Manzutto and José Kuri, and now is the most important private gallery in Mexico. Located in a former industrial bakery in Mexico City, the gallery has a large gallery space, a library, a social area, a kitchen and a bar, acting as a venue for exhibitions—they represent the most important Mexican artists alongside international artists such as Relational aesthetics pioneer Rirkrit Tiravanija and YBA Sarah Lucas—but also as a laboratory and meeting place for the local community.



Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi, President of the Sharjah Art Foundation and the Director of the Sharjah Biennial. Courtesy of Sharjah Art Foundation.

Although full of contradictions, the Middle East has also played a crucial role in the expansion of institutional focus. The most interesting initiatives in this region are the Sharjah Art Foundation in the United Arab Emirates, and Artis, based in Tel Aviv and New York. Founded in 2009 by Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi, the Sharjah Art Foundation is in charge with the Sharjah Biennial—which was curated by major players such as Suzanne Cotter and Yuko Hasegawa—and the March Meeting—the most polyphonic art event in the Muslim world, from Africa to India, via the Middle East—among other activities. Founded in 2004 by Rivka Saker, Chairman of Sotheby's Israel, and functioning as a private cultural council, Artis helped boost the international visibility of artists such as Public Movement, Guy Ben-Ner, Yael Bartana, and Sigalit Landau, but also took part in the dialogue around the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel.

In a time defined by globalization, connectivity, and post-Post-Colonialism, institutions do well to shift their gaze towards the so-called “peripheral centers,” but also to take an inclusive approach to displaying art coming from centers farther afield side by side with positions more clearly associated with Western centers. Highlighting complexity and multiplicity, the binaries of the past are finally being read as an inclusive pattern.

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