

And I would like to express here again how important I consider this event, indeed the entire research project.² I have been working as an art mediator³ at mumok for 20 years. And the questions raised above arise again and again in art education when we discuss works by Otto Mühl with school classes or adults: firstly, because of the violent aesthetics of his works⁴; secondly, because of the contexts in which they were created⁵; and thirdly, because of the condemnation of Otto Mühl and the media reports on sexualized violence. Visitors address these contexts. On the one hand, aggression, brutality and violence are perceived and addressed in the works. On the other hand, questions are asked such as: “Why is this art?”; “Why is this hanging here?”; “How does something like this get into a museum?” And unfortunately, we have to assume that individuals in the respective groups (visitors as well as art educators) have had to make experiences with sexualized abuse of power and sexualized violence.

ON THE PRACTICE OF ART EDUCATION

I would like to begin by briefly outlining the work of art education in order to make the following considerations comprehensible. In all mediation formats, be it guided tours, art talks or workshops⁶, we always deal with multi-perspective situations. Participants and art mediators do not know each other, so they have no shared experience, neither with regard to their use of language nor with regard to the aesthetic and art-historical or art-scientific frames of reference. The range of speech acts and possible actions is enormous: ideas of norms can be obscuring, hostile to discussion, sexuality and the body. Defensive reactions may be

2 Apart from mumok’s chief curator Rainer Fuchs, who participated in the panel “Kritical Curating – Positionen of Curators and Museums”, the symposium was also visited by Jörg Wolfert, curator of the mediation programme for adults at mumok.

3 At mumok Vienna we work in a team of 8–15 art mediators who also conceive – coordinated by the mediation programme’s curators – the mediation formats specific to exhibition and age.

4 See online: <https://www.mumok.at/kalender/queer-feministisch-betrachtet>, accessed 2023/08/08.

5 Detailed information on the evolutionary history of Mühl’s works can be found in the volume on hand. See especially the contributions by Georgia Doll, Andy Simanowitz, MATHILDA, and Elisabeth Schäfer.

6 In the following, I will limit myself to formats with adults and adolescents (from 4th grade in Austria) and to projects and exhibition situations associated with works by Otto Mühl and with all works coming from violence contexts.

necessary. The unexpected can lead to new considerations. Public discourses are reflected in queries or statements. Marginalized knowledge is both formulated and heard or ignored. Visitors formulate, inquire, demand, refuse, and add. These are some of the special qualities of art education, which does not conclude with a result, but rather — if it succeeds — enables an inconclusive process of understanding and supports reflexive, critical attitudes of all participants. It is also the impulses and contributions of the participants that change a museum, or what happens in it. Visitors have certainly helped to change my approach to Otto Mühl's work — and they still do.

In addition to guided tours, we also organize so-called “art talks” with school classes, which take place in mumok's exhibition rooms. We try to support the participants with practical exercises and/or by associating objects, materials, or concepts, to find their own access and to open up conversations⁷. In this format, the participants select the works, which are then discussed together in the group. The format is therefore very different from a guided tour. We develop specific procedures and methods for concrete exhibition situations and try to offer constructive spaces of experience and negotiation for reflective, critical conversations and attitudes. In the years 2002 to the decade we worked, for example, with the workshop “Weißer geht's nicht”⁸ (English Title: “Whiter Than White”) in then historically oriented exhibitions on Viennese Actionism. Starting with a sensitizing linguistic critique of advertising slogans about cleaning products and a preoccupation with sexuality, dirt and disgust, aesthetic, historical and political dimensions and contexts of Viennese Actionism were elaborated and reflected upon.

7 See: „Kunst und“ (Edited by Claudia Ehgartner for mumok) (2014): Reader with six theme booklets on focal points of mediation work at mumok Vienna. Also see: Stutz, Ulrike (2002): “Inszenierung von Handlungsräumen – Kunstvermittlung für SchülerInnen”, in: Kunstcoop© (Hg.): Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst. Berlin.

8 A workshop format conceived by Maria Bucher for pupils of grammar-school and vocational school senior classes. Workshops of this series also have a “practical” part in mumok's studio and take 2–3 hours.

CRITICISMS OF CANONIZATION

Linda Nochlin's essay "Why have there been no great female artists?"⁹ is not the only way to argue for a relational understanding of art that takes the social into account and contextualizes it. Linda Nochlin counters the patriarchal sexist statement that there have been no female "Picassos" with the statement: Yes, because they have not been made. Because many actors have a share in what we receive [perceive?] as art. Artists, gallery owners, critics, curators, art mediators, art scholars and many more — weave, describe, text what we receive as art. Here, the political responsibility in relation to what is considered art becomes well visible; also, on the basis of the question: Which contexts in which this art was created are perceived? Black feminist, trans and queer feminist, feminist and post- as well as decolonial art producers, scholars and critics, in addition to the concept of genius, repeatedly criticize auratizations and decontextualizations of artworks, as they are also produced by the separation of artist and work. It is very relevant who is the author of a work, which contexts of meaning are formed in the reception by way of which aesthetic means and with which perspectives of observation. It is important to analyze how violence is formulated in the works. Many Black/queer/trans/feminist, post- and decolonial, power-critical, and anti-ableist artistic and (art) theoretical works address sexualized violence, destructive dominance, and other forms of violence¹⁰. For example, in 1980, feminist artist VALIE EXPORT wrote about the "return" of "cut, deformation, and blood" in "Feminist Actionism" that these "[were] not as reflections of sado-masochistic needs, not as tensions of abnormal drives, but as marks of history, as traces of concepts on the body, as body marks uncovered in actions with the body".¹¹

9 Nochlin, Linda (1971): "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?"; in: Gornick, Vivian / Moran, Barbara (eds.): *Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness*. New York: Basic Books. The text has often been reprinted and was translated into German and other languages.

10 In a blog post formerly published on the mumok website, titled „Feministisch Betrachtet – Bilder der Gewalt und Gewalt der Bilder“ [Feminist Perspectives – Images of Violence and the Violence of Images], a conversation with Elisabeth Schäfer in the exhibition „Enjoy – die mumok Sammlung im Wandel“ [Enjoy – The mumok Collection in Transition], Elisabeth Schäfer had the opportunity to speak with Mikki Muhr about perspectives on a nuanced approach to representations of violence in the context of art education and mediation. The conversation addressed works by Maria Lassnig, VALIE EXPORT, Mladen Stilinoić, Gina Pane, and Otto Mühl.

11 VALIE EXPORT's theoretisation of feminist action art is especially interesting with

VIOLENCE AND ABUSE OF POWER

I consider it important to understand the context of sexualized violence and art and art education discussed here as connected to all these discourses. Feminist¹², anti-ableist, post- and decolonial discourses are power-sensitive, hegemony-critical discourses and their knowledge in the context of art, power, abuse of power, sexualized violence, oppression, knowledge formations and knowledge exclusions is of enormous importance. Also, because, as Marion Thuswald states in her chapter “Sex and Violence” in the publication “Enabling Sexual Education”: “(t)he talk of sexual violence as violence and not as part of sexuality I consider extremely important to adequately grasp the phenomenon.” (Thuswald 2022: 356, translated by ES) This is not to exclude the discussion of sexual violence in sexual education contexts. However, a clear language of distinction is needed. And again, it is clear that sexual violence needs to be discussed within a broader spectrum of violence, abuse of power, and social structures of oppression.

In addition to this, in the museum context, in my perception, the interaction and intersection of multiple discourses, knowledge productions, and efforts by those affected, activists, artists, and scholars cause institutions to develop greater awareness of the problem and greater sensitivity to contexts that have long been ignored. Responsibility can no longer be so easily pushed aside. Enormously widely publicized in the media: the #MeToo movement. But also movements against femicide and violence against women and against patriarchal oppression such as: “8M — ni una menos”, a feminist movement initiated in Argentina and now active worldwide; “Selbstlaut — Fachstelle für sexualisierte Gewalt an Kindern und Jugendlichen”, which analyzed the wall texts for the Schiele exhibition of Albertina in 2017¹³, MATHILDA and the

reference to Otto Mühl and Viennese Actionism, because she clearly distance herself – as can be seen in the citation – from a mere repetition of violence and excess, and always tries to think both in deferral. EXPORT 1980: 143, Quote translated by Elisabeth Schäfer and David Ender.

12 The importance of feminist, queer-feminist and lesbian approaches in sex education for sensitisation regarding sexualised abuse of power and violence was also stressed by Marion Thuswald in a conversation with me.

13 See online: https://igbildendekunst.at/bildpunkt/_es-gibt-nicht-nur-eine-feministische-kunstkritik-sondern-viele-achsen-der-kunstkritik/, accessed 2023/08/08.

research group of the FWF PEEK project PPC [AR 568] and numerous affected persons who make accusations and demand a change in social consciousness. Scholars and activists from queer/black/trans/feminist, postcolonial, decolonial, antiracist, and anti-abstract contexts question exhibition policies, ownership relations, and the treatment of collection holdings and traditional canonizations in museum institutions. In the context of art history and art theory, Black/queer/trans/feminist, anti-ableist and decolonial art historians, theorists and producers have for decades criticized power-obscuring, colonial, patriarchal (art) histories, and analyzed how power is abused, violence, racism, sexualized violence, sexism, and traditional gender concepts are formulated and neutralized as well as naturalized in the artworks themselves, or with which visual and discursive means victims are turned into perpetrators.

CONTEXTUALIZING DISCOMFORT — AGAINST REWARDED IGNORANCE

Occasionally museums provide works from different problematic contexts of origin and collections with explanatory texts. For example, in the collection exhibition “Enjoy — the mumok Collection in Transition,” chief curator Rainer Fuchs pointed out the violent contexts on the pedestal of a monitor showing videos by Otto Mühl¹⁴. People like to talk about “contextualizing” and debate whether “contextualizing” is an “opening” or a “closing” of the interpretive space, of the reception situation. Contexts, however, are already present — not only thought of in terms of art history, but also historically, politically, in terms of power politics, socially, and so on. The question, rather, is which contexts are presented (and rehearsed and/or naturalized) as connected to the work, and which contexts are ignored. Through an addition of text as described above, it becomes perceptible that we are dealing with set framings and that these can be revised, criticized, recast. Especially in my work as an art educator, I have learned to welcome and use this as an opening movement. In my

14 This is not the place for a detailed analysis of the text. However, its important statement for me is its concluding declaration: “In its differentiated engagement with the work and the person of Otto Mühl, mumok professes to put the problematic aspects up for critical and open discussion [...]” — which I commend as a self-critical position and expression of a process of un-learning. At the time this contribution was conceived, MATHILDA, following an invitation by Rainer Fuchs, realised an artistic intervention in the exhibition “ON STAGE – Kunst als Bühne”; see online: <https://www.mumok.at/de/stage>, accessed 2023/08/08.

experience, it makes it easier for visitors to put themselves in relation to the works and to exchange ideas, addressing discrimination, exploitation, and abuse of power. For example, in the aforementioned exhibition “Enjoy — the mumok collection in transition” (sic), a work by Constantin Brancusi from 1933 was accompanied by a text that referred to racist, colonialist, and stereotyping contexts. I usually began guided tours of this exhibition with a discussion of this wall inscription. In this way, I was able to open up spaces for action — for visitors as well as for me as a mediator. Discomfort, arising in the face of a dominating, obscuring canon in which questions about violence and responsibility are excluded, becomes reflectable (Schmutzer 2015). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak speaks in the postcolonial context of a “rewarded ignorance” with which colonial structures are reproduced and which “does not embarrass, but on the contrary stabilizes one’s own position of power”¹⁵ — also by declaring contexts irrelevant. The above-described acts of speaking out, addressing and bringing in previously excluded, ignored (and also repressed) contexts are important moments in the course of a process of unlearning¹⁶ obscuring, discriminating and neutralizing de-contextualizations that abuse power and violence. Whereby the respective concrete interventions against the “rewarded ignorance” should be specifically conceived – and thus different options for action must and can be worked out.

In conversations with sex educators and educational scientists, I have recently noticed a revealing shift in the meaning of the term “contextualize”: In the context of sexuality education settings, “contextualizing” describes actions that are intended to provide orientation at the beginning of an event — in terms of space, boundaries, and possibilities for action (e.g., that it is possible to leave the situation at any time, followed by

15 See: Castro Varela / María do Mar (2007): “Verlernen und die Strategie des unsichtbaren Ausbesserns. Bildung und Postkoloniale Kritik”, in: Bildpunkt. Zeitschrift der IG bildende Kunst. Wien, 4–7.

In this text the author explicitly refers to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, see: Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1999): *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Translation of the quote by ES.

16 Another term by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak which is widely discussed in the context of art education and art mediation. Spivak understands herself as a teacher and works on pedagogical and iconographic problem areas, questions, and perspectives – as seen from decolonial positions. Many discourses meet in museums, which is why gathering together concepts from different contexts that thematise violence, resistance, and dealing with experiences of violence in different ways, seems important to me – without evening out differences and blanking out different claims.

indications of where the exit is). “Contextualizing” here means a comprehensible framing or linguistic imagery that is intended to help perceive, articulate, and also counter boundaries and boundary violations — in contrast to confusion-inducing “naturalizations” or “neutralizations”.

SHARING PERSPECTIVES AND AGENCY WITH QUESTIONS

In this text I have outlined some practical examples and experiences from art mediation in order to illustrate mediation situations to a degree. In mediation situations with young people as well as with adults, it is important to be able to keep access to conflictual, violent topics open. Here, cooperation and joint further training of sex educators and art mediators are very important and beneficial — due to their expertise and due to the shared experience, since in both fields of work, groups are often only worked with for the duration of the workshop¹⁷. The researchers of the FWF PEEK project PPC and the MATHILDA group at events during the course of the research have repeatedly noted how difficult and necessary it is first of all to find words, to be able to use them, to develop a language that can be shared and an understanding of language that can carry the dynamics in the course of the confrontations and the changes associated with them. This also became very clear to me again and again in conversations and in training sessions¹⁸ with sex educators: that on the one hand it is a matter of opening up language spaces — but these must then also be able to be held in order to acquire a language and then to be able to communicate with it. And that framings (contextualizations), setting of boundaries and the perception of transgressions of boundaries are important.

17 We were able to gain experience in this respect in 2016 during a cooperation of mumok’s art mediation with the Institute for Artistic Teaching of the Academy of Fine Arts, in particular represented by Marion Thuswald. Out of this came a workshop for art mediators and sex educators with Sabine Ziegelwanger (sex educator and sociologist) and Mikki Muhr, author of the text on hand, at mumok. Moreover, a book presentation was held: *teaching desires: “Möglichkeitenräume sexueller Bildung im künstlerisch-gestalterischen Unterricht”*; Löcker Verlag, Wien, 2016.

18 For instance, further training for the art mediation team with Sabine Ziegelwanger (sex educator and sociologist) at mumok in the framework of the exhibition “OH!” by Jakob Lena Knebl in 2016.

At the beginning of this text, my questions were: “Where am I involved as an art mediator?”, “How do I relate to this?” and “What do I have to/ what can I change?”. These questions remain and will not be resolved by any answers. With an art education oriented towards complexity, it can and must be discussed again and again from whom, where, what, and how something enters the museum. And which social dimensions are reflected in it. Art can be difficult, challenging, questioning boundaries. For this we need landscapes of conversation, words and spaces for negotiation. And demanding and implementing these spaces is in contrast to right-wing discourses that propagate authoritarian structures and ideas of norms as a promise of security. As has become clear, an intersectional, feminist approach as well as a broad cooperation with all actors involved in the art and exhibition process is important to me. A sensitized attitude towards inclusion and exclusion of contexts and knowledge and towards neutralization of violence and abuse of power is needed in order to develop changes from a responsible attitude. I also think that if one does not do this, it leads to an ossified and lifeless understanding of art.¹⁹

Contextualizing can support the ability to act and is part of various necessary processes of change when questions about conditions, backgrounds and functions are addressed. The question of background and function “is the basis for change. “This question enables us to see a fundamental changeability.”²⁰

— **Mikki Muhr** is an artist in Vienna and feminist art mediator at mumok Vienna. There, Mikki Muhr has been leading the guided tour format “Feministisch Betrachtet” (“In A Feminist Perspective”) for many years, which is aimed at all those interested in art. At irregular intervals, exhibitions and artworks are discussed with feminist knowledge, questions and perspective.

19 In 1989 the “Guerilla Girls” already asked: “When Racism and Sexism are no longer fashionable, what will your Art collection be worth?“, see online: <https://www.guerrillagirls.com/projects>, accessed 2023/08/08.

20 Susanne Lummerding „Applying Feminisms – Animal* Within*“, Blogbeitrag zum gleichnamigen Gespräch in der Reihe „Feministisch Betrachtet“, see online: <https://www.mumok.at/en/blog/app-lying-feminisms-animal-within>

LITERATURE

Castro Varela/ María do Mar (2007): »Verlernen und die Strategie des unsichtbaren Ausbesserns. Bildung und Postkoloniale Kritik«, in: Bildpunkt. Zeitschrift der IGBildende Kunst. Wien, 4–7.

Henschel, Alexander (2020): Was heißt hier Kunstvermittlung? Kunstvermittlung und ihr umstrittener Begriff. Wien: Zaglossus Verlag.

EXPORT, VALIE (1980): »Feministischer Aktionismus: Aspekte«, in: Nabakowski, Gisind/Sander, Helke/Gorsen, Peter (Hg.): Frauen in der Kunst. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Ehgartner, Claudia (Hg.) (2014): Reader mit sechs Themenheften zu Schwerpunkten der Vermittlungsarbeit am mumok Wien.

Lindner, Ines/Schade, Sigrid/Wenk, Silke/Werner, Gabriele (Hg.) (1989): Blick-Wechsel. Konstruktionen von Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit in Kunst und Kunstgeschichte. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag Berlin.

Nochlin, Linda (1971): »Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?«, in: Gornick, Vivian/ Moran, Barbara (eds.): Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness. New York: Basic Books.

Schmutzer, Karla (2015): »Reflektiertes Unbehagen«, in: Sattler, Elisabeth/Tschida, Ingeborg (Hg.): Pädagogisches Lehren. Einsprüche universitärer Lehre. Wien: Löcker 2015, 87–106.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1999): A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Stutz, Ulrike (2002): »Inszenierung von Handlungsräumen – Kunstvermittlung für SchülerInnen«, in: Kunstcoop© (Hg.): Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst. Berlin.

Thuswald, Marion (2022): Sexuelle Bildung ermöglichen. Bielefeld: transcript.