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About the Museum

Interviews with Giovanni Anselmo, Georg Baselitz, Luciano Fabro, Donald Judd, Per Kirkeby by Francesco Poli.

Francesco Poli

Giovanni Anselmo

FRANCESCO POLI: For the artist the studio is 'the workshop of creation', where with great concentration it is possible to conceive, experiment and reflect on the quality and esthetic effectiveness of his own work, but it is only through external verification that the work can really exist as a concrete artistic achievement. This happens through various conditions of spatial existence, precarious or stable: art galleries, public exhibitions, art fairs, private collections, museums. For many artists, and particularly in your case, the work is realized in close relationship with space, which is the essential element of the installation. In general how do you cope with this type of problem? To what extent do the limits and eventual conditions of the particular exhibiting position intervene with the perfect idea of the work which you intend to install?

GIOVANNI ANSELMO: For some time now, for the particular conception of the works and of their weight and measurement, I live most of the times the adventure of the work, in its concrete realization, directly in the space destined for the exhibition in the moment of its installation.

The quality and esthetic effectiveness of the work excludes the fact of precarious or stable spatial conditions, private or public. The limits and eventual conditions linked to a particular exhibiting position cannot but intervene in a positive way or not intervene at all with the elements which physically make up the work. Indeed, either the work is realized at the same moment as the installation and, if it uses the elements of the exhibiting space it uses only those elements that are suitable, or the work does not consider the environment in which it must be exhibited; it exists already at the moment of installation and can be installed even by others.

F.P.: Usually the museum, even for artists, represents the place of highest prestige for the collocation of their own works. It should be a guarantee of stability and maximum cultural resonance. But museums are not all the same: apart from their importance, there are many differences regarding choices and criteria of arrangement. I won't ask you to describe your ideal museum. More concretely, taking into account your own experiences, what are the aspects which you consider to be essential in a museum for a just and full appreciation of the work of artists?

G.A.: Certainly the moment in which a museum chooses an artist or a work is fundamental because the quality of how the museum itself operates depends on that and it is determinant that such a choice can profit by the competence and capacity of the person whose task it is.

As for the essential aspects for a full appreciation of the work of artists it is important that the museum must be able to organize one-man shows, must be able to buy works at least from the artists it exhibits in such shows and it must be able to propose and realize 'exchange exhibitions'

with other museums even of other countries.

F.P.: Regarding the wider context of social and cultural reality, is the museum an adequate structure or a gilded prison? A gilded prison which, in exchange for legitimatizing and 'making sacred' works of art, in many respects neutralizes the potential for breaking away of the best ones, thus rendering them, one can say, impotent for the exterior world? I realize that this is a 1968 question, however there is still reason to ask it today.

G.A.: If the contemporary art museum replies carefully and punctually to its functions regarding contemporary art, not only does the power of 'breaking away' of the works not turn out to be neutralized, rather it assumes the possibility of being much enlarged because such works acquire the opportunity of being seen by a much larger public.

In using the term 'breaking away' which you propose to me in your question, perhaps it is advisable to make clear, in order to avoid misunderstandings, that I have always realized a work solely in order to answer an interior impulse to do or say something and not with the objective of making it assume a power of breaking away.

The function of a contemporary art museum must be above all that of showing 'today' the works of art of 'today' and it must choose those with the most profound aspects which are then collected together as permanent values for everyone.

In this sense it is difficult to imagine another space which can and which should be more public or more open to the public: the public made up of people coming not only from outside but often from far away, especially if the museum contains high quality works.

F.P.: This question is to a certain extent connected to the two preceding ones: has the opportunity or necessity to realize works destined to remain in museums stimulated in artists new creative solutions, new criteria for adapting the work to the specific requirements of these exhibiting spaces? What do you think are the eventual qualitative facts to emerge from this?

G.A.: The beauty or quality of a work is not measured by the fact that it was created for a museum. Once upon a time artists worked in the grottos or the palace of the prince or king or in the Cappella Sistina or wherever there was the possibility. Nowadays one also works in the museum if it is the museum which has the possibility of offering a space.

F.P.: The contemporary art museum can have a prevailing character of historical documentation, with a sequence of rooms which propose more or less chronologically to the public the moments considered to be most meaningful for the artistic periods under consideration. The risk in these cases is that of benefiting didactic information (a task much more suitable for art history books) instead of the research far conditions allowing the best possible reading of each single work of the artists. For many aspects this concept is opposed by the idea of the museum as a collection of contemporary art understood as exalting quality rather than quantity, through rigorous selection and very careful arrangement of the works. What can you tell me about this?

G.A.: The work is the indispensable and determining factor because it is also a reference point for whatever discourse on art.

The best works divulge signals, facts, sensations and data of the highest and greatest intensity.

The museum is a service whose primary requirement is to allow and to guarantee the presence of the works and to answer the idea of an activity strained to exalt quality rather than quantity. With very high quality works concretely present it is still possible to carry out better didactic activities.

F.P.: How do you consider the situation of contemporary art museums in Italy? What are the

differences compared to other countries?

G.A.: The situation of contemporary art museums in Italy is just so insufficient as to result in being practically inexistent. Abroad there are not only situations but there are situations with museums which 'work'.

F.P.: Through big public exhibitions and collocation in museums the distance between the works of research artists like you (once called avanguard) and the public has been greatly reduced. Do you think that on the part of this public there is a hasty and superficial consummation of art in terms of fashion, curiosity, passing the time, or are you waiting for something more culturally positive?

G.A.: In Italy the distance between the works and the public hasn't been greatly reduced simply because there hasn't been on the part of museums and public bodies an exhibition policy which offers exhaustive and continuing opportunities. The position is completely different abroad where much greater possibilities have been given not only for big group exhibitions but also for big one-man shows.

Perhaps part of this public has a superficial and hasty relationship with the works, since the fragmentary possibility of seeing the works and the contemporary in art magazines has determined and allowed a slightly more theoretical and abstract relationship with art.

F.P.: When you yourself are a visitor to a museum how do you react when you find yourself in front of one of your exhibited works?

G.A.: Before my own work, exhibited in a museum or in any other place, I sometimes have a strange feeling of anxiety for the work still to do. A slight sense of anxiety and confusion for the fact of finding myself confronting the defined and finished element of a work done with the not known element of a new work still in that moment non-existent and unknown.

Georg Baselitz

FRANCESCO POLI: I should like to begin with a fairly general question concerning the role of museums of contemporary art in relation to the process of historical legitimatization of the work of art. In the past the museums were spaces devoted to the works of artists whose value had already been 'consecrated' by history. Very rarely did they show the works of living artists: yet since the war there has been a notable increase in the number of museums of contemporary art, showing works of artists at the height of their creative powers. Has the purpose of the museum changed then, from that of preserver to that of active contributor to the production of the history of art? Or is it one of the ways in which contemporary civilization gives tribute to itself, 'monumentalizing' the dimension of the present, without allowing the passage of time to create its own natural evaluation and selection?

GEORG BASELITZ: The difference is not in the things but in the question. There have always been artists, art galleries and museums naturally only in the context of cultural situations in which this question makes sense.

F.P.: Is there a link between my first discourse and the current situation regarding the market for contemporary art? What is your evaluation of the situation?

G.B.: In the 20th century what has changed is that the buying, either public or private, of artists has disappeared and the role of buyer has not been assumed either by museums or by galleries. So that whatever the artist provokes or, better, creates is commercialized. This makes the artistic

manifestations freer and the qualitative valuation is possible only retrospectively.

F.P.: It is obviously very positive that through the large public exhibitions and museums, research in contemporary art (formerly for the exclusive attention and use of the tiny minority) has been able to reach a wide public in a direct way, instead of through the media of magazines and books. Is there not a risk of art being treated in a too superficial mode, in terms of fashion, curiosity and pastime? And is there not also the danger that the public demand for art could affect the curators choice, and even the production of the artists themselves?

G.B. : I don't think that the public is more numerous than before. On the contrary I think that the qualitative valuation is more uncertain than previously, that the people responsible (the curators) are now more conservative, that the tendency towards applied art and the so-called classical has grown and that here the public is bigger and that the greater part of the contemporary experiments are treated very unintelligently.

For the large public the media play more Mozart than Stockhausen, show more Rubens than Warhol. Modern always begins with Cézanne.

F.P.: Museums have an essential part to play in the formation of contemporary figurative culture, at national and international levels. Among the many museums around the world, there is much diversity with regard to level, quality, and the whole set up in general. What, in your point of view, are the main characteristics that a contemporary art museum should have in order to create the best possible conditions in which the work of an artist can be viewed?

G.B.: The best condition for the museum - apparently - is economic independence.

F.P.: There are examples of your work in many of the most important museums in Europe and the USA. But comparing the major differences in the setting of your works, that is the space, the distance between your work and that of other artists) the way of inserting a piece into the permanent collection - could you give me some example relative to your experience, citing the cases where you have been most satisfied?

G.B.: I am particularly happy with the collection in Turin at Castello di Rivoli put together by a man of great competence and vast knowledge.

F.P.: In an article in the 'New York Times', John Russel accuses curators in general, of being too conformist in their choice, with the result that too many museums are too similar. To give but one example, he states that artists such as yourself and Frank Stella 'have become sacred, obligatory and inevitable everywhere'. All of which would do little for the individualization of a museum and would certainly be to the detriment of other, talented but lesser known artists. How would you reply to this type of objection?

G.B.: While there aren't museums in Africa, Asia and elsewhere, I think that whatever is produced today is to be seen everywhere and this reveals that even the national culture in America is European.

F.P.: To what extent have the opportunity and the necessity to work for museums affected your research? In other words, does being given a firm place in the official, public eye not have its effect on the identity of your work?

G.B.: I am alive and work also with paintings done by others. My identity is me myself. My paintings are not a doctrine on the path to discover the truth for paintings. The painting of tomorrow is different to the painting of today and is still unknown to me.

F.P.: At Castello di Rivoli is in process of building up a permanent collection of contemporary art of international flavour, specially taking into account the difficult but fascinating relation to the beautiful spaces created among the Juvarrian baroque architecture. The idea is to create a museum without a heavy, historical-documentary or educational bias, emphasizing the quality rather than the quantity of works exhibited, by paying particular attention to the problems of setting of each carefully selected work (taking into account the particular identity of every piece). How would you evaluate this curator's way of working compared to other possible solutions to display?

G.B.: The building is beautiful. If it had been less beautiful everyone would have suffered.

My interest regarding the presentation is much less than that of the curator. I can only discharge my paintings from the workshop and then have no influence to change their quality. However a bad curator can put my paintings in an unfavourable context from which, again, everything suffers. Above all at Rivoli I expect to find artists who work in Italy and who you don't see elsewhere, because I think that in Italy more than in Germany the too powerful and upright tradition leads to a very conservative and restrictive mentality. The aggressiveness of the artists in Italy is toned down by the happy surroundings of this country.

F.P.: How do you judge the situation of contemporary art museums and private and public structures concerned with contemporary art in general, here in Italy?

G.B.: It is hardly possible to judge because there are no examples. Perhaps, merely, they are not known, but, however, this question contradicts what you have previously asked and stated.

Luciano Fabro

FRANCESCO POLI: What does a productive relationship, the exchange of experiences, synergy, if one can say it like this, between the activity of the artist and the activity of a museum mean to you? Is it important for the quality and improvement of public collections?

LUCIANO FABRO: For an artist, working with a museum is not only a question of the quality of the spaces; it is a problem of a more general order. Because when you work with a museum, you work with relation to a city, to a structure which has its own characteristics, to a specific cultural policy. There is a policy behind every cultural action which can be in one sense or in another. In a certain sense the most easily resolved and the simplest moment is the moment of exhibiting. Once one has experience and is sufficiently sure of one's means and quality it is the least problematical part. It is almost tautological to say that if one is invited to work in a museum it means that you are esteemed, at least in that particular context (I can be esteemed in certain places and regarded as smoke in the eyes in others). There is a synergic action working in a museum, when a director chooses not so much an artist as a context, in order to have around him an active, culturally alive situation.

There are also museums and exhibiting structures which I would call, let us say, 'Harrods' museums of a more or less high level, where everything passes through; where an inventory of everything which happens can be made with absolutely no discernment. But in these cases there is rarely much involvement by the artist. At the most, if it is a dignified exhibition, the artist will send a work with probably only some problems of installation.

F.P.: What do you think of museum directors?

L.F.: In Europe there is usually a certain relationship, even friendship, between artists and museum

directors; an exchange not only of information but also of strain and solicitation. Friendship in the sense of work, of collaboration. All the people with whom I have worked in museums are people with whom I have continued to keep in touch, sometimes approvingly, sometimes criticisingly and questioningly. This seems to be more European than American. In America a thing of this type would not be well considered in as much as it might influence the independence of choices. I must admit that the few times that I have worked in the States I have had constructive relationships even there: it is enough to provoke them and not be timid in passing judgement or have partisanship tendencies. An active exchange is then appreciated.

F.P.: There is also the problem of interrelations with other artists when you work in what you have defined as a favourable context, a culturally positive situation, in general coherent to your position. In these cases do you prefer situations where there is a link of affinity or of opposition? What can you learn from communal experiences of shows and installations with other artists?

L.F.: There are so many of those positions while being coherent that to absolutely privilege one would be a disaster. I can give you two examples from my experience; one positive, the other less so. Recently, together with Kounellis and Paolini, we had an exhibition at Naples of three installations very different among themselves. Knowing each other well, each of us was very aware that the reason why his own work would be successful was that the work of the other two should also function well; it's a circuit. But there it was a question of experience.

On the other hand at Kassel, in a space to divide with Baselitz, he found himself with a bit of a problem because he wasn't there at the moment of the installation of the works. He hadn't taken into consideration the rate of light and spatial filter of my work and, as a result, his paintings remained embedded in the walls. An unfortunate event.

You ask me what one learns through communal experiences. One learns, working, both from the errors of the others and from your own. In a certain sense it is much easier from the errors of the others, because you never ever see your own. Also because your own error can be an error which might then become a possible new opening. The essential thing is not so much in making an error as in not mistaking the direction. However it is not easy to understand when the others make mistakes, because they also have this double value.

F.P.: For you, what is the difference between gallery spaces, precarious and ephemeral as far as regards the installation of works, and those of museums, which, institutionally, should be the places of stable presence for artists' work in as much as they are witness to the history of art?

L.F.: In practice this difference doesn't exist any more because there is no museum in the world which can permit itself to permanently exhibit everything which it has bought. From this point of view the position of Castello di Rivoli is enviable, because, not having a collection accumulated over previous years, the curators have the possibility of proposing and expressing their model of an ideal collection. This is something which other museums, even very important ones, cannot do. So in essence the spatial installation of works of art is precarious both in museums and in galleries.

F.P.: On the other side of the coin, however, is the difficulty of finding funds for the permanent acquisition of works; a situation particularly serious in Italy. According to you, what are the reasons for the very unhappy situation of the contemporary art museums in Italy, for their bureaucratic slowness and for their inefficiency?

L.F.: Why do museums accumulate works at present? The reason is that only by accumulating works of art can they allow themselves to realize big exhibitions. Because if I am not able to lend you important works, you will not lend them to me when it is my turn. In Italy it is possible to have

wonderful exhibitions of old art, with material arriving from all over the world, because when it's our turn we can send loans abroad. This is not possible for contemporary art due to a fall in the cultural level of the political classes. For example, a very big international exhibition with works of the highest quality, 'Contemporanea', was organized in Rome in 1970. It ranged from Pop Art to really contemporary works. No other country would have lost the opportunity on that occasion of buying at least part of the works exhibited for a public museum. At this point we could have had here in Italy works by Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Beuys and many other names of great prominence.

In Italy we stopped buying when the others began. One country which is able to have absolutely any type of exhibition is Switzerland; it can do with contemporary art exactly what we can do with 15th century art.

F.P.: One justification which one hears regarding this question is that in Italy the problems concerning the protection and conservation of ancient art are so great that it is not possible to concern oneself satisfactorily also with contemporary art, because of lack of means.

L.F.: It appears to me to be an indefensible justification. One thing does not exclude the other; in particular in Italy which has always had throughout its history, even in this century, an artistic production important also for the full appreciation of its own image. To Italy, in as much as it is a country of the arts, contemporary art is an essential fact too; a demonstration of its continuing creative vitality. And in order to demonstrate this museums of contemporary art capable of coping with the situation are necessary. Money is not lacking: it is enough to spend it well and opportunely.

F.P.: What are your ideas about the role of the contemporary art museum?

L.F.: Apart from the function of a museum as a 'store', a deposit for the accumulation and conservation of works of art, which is however necessary, I think that there are two principal concepts for a museum. The first concept is pragmatic, economic, we can say protestant: 'the museum is an investment', 'the museum is a bank of works of art', etc. On the other hand the word 'museum' means 'place of the Muses', where beautiful young girls make life cheerful. And this is more our, a Mediterranean concept: the museum as a place where one can do wonderful things, where one can feel good. We, even artists, tend to give to this space a more humanistic role, more varied and less rigid. I think that today the museum can develop the role which was once that of the patron; the person who helped artists to live by getting them to realize works in order to enrich, in the sense of beauty, the social reality.

F.P.: To what extent can one value the function of legitimization and cultural appreciation of the museum with respect to the work of artists? Are the richer museums the more important ones in this sense?

L.F.: The museums which are most noticed from a serious cultural point of view are not necessarily the richest. The best museums are in countries where there is a great tradition, as for example Germany, Holland and in part the USA. But among these museums the most prestigious, as far as regards the legitimization of the quality of an artist, are not the biggest. For example, in the early 60's the museum of Leverkusen was very important; a museum which amazed me when I saw it for the modesty of its exhibition space. But why had it become famous? Because there exhibitions like those of Klein, Manzoni, Castellani etc. had been held in advance of all the rest of the world. Therefore much, if not all, depends on the capacity and quality of the choices of the person responsible for the artistic activity. In every period of artistic research there is in a certain sense a leading group, a certain number of artists who are reference points towards the best direction.

F.P.: Is the museum for an artist like you a point of arrival or a point of departure? In other words, can one say that today the historic cultural identity of the artist is formed beginning with the museum, whereas in the past artists very rarely arrived in museums during their lifetimes?

L.F.: Among people devoted to art there are two categories: those who like to work with living artists and those who only intervene on the works of dead artists. Working with dead artists it is possible to say whatever one likes about their work. Whereas working with living artists means always having many uncertainties, it means being immersed in a continual conflict. And it is also true that the function of museums after the war has changed a lot, but this doesn't mean that the cultural emergence of an artist of quality depends exclusively on them.

F.P.: In many cases of exhibition layout or new museum architecture the design of the architect has a very strong character. In essence the architects are protagonists in the definition and articulation of exhibition spaces which therefore result in being very strongly distinguished. Does this fact not risk interfering with the work of the artists?

L.F.: There are battles... The architect wants to keep a space for himself. He says: 'I am a builder of spaces'. Only that many artists are also builders of spaces, so there are two contending for the same bone. It is clear that conflicts and compromises arise. Modern museum structure originated in the 19th century. So one sees museums built with the utmost attention to the light, having the dado for the correct environmental equilibrium for hanging pictures and with spaces fit for the exhibition of sculpture. There was a logic for the decorated space which arose from a certain idea that the architect had of art. Then we have the museum built in the 30's which begins to be more flexible.

For example, the building of the Triennale in Milan by Muzio, freed from all the added elements, is a marvellous exhibition space with a wonderful light; a continuous space which can be constantly varied. The Guggenheim is a complete horror of a museum because all the paintings appear distorted. But Wright had it in for the artists. In the latest achievements by architects, such limits have been reached that, by way of saying, if you produce a blue painting they will put a red light on it. But I think the fashion for this type of museum has finished; we will return to clean spaces which function towards a better rendering for artists from the exhibiting point of view.

Donald Judd

FRANCESCO POLI: For several years there has been lively discussion about museums and in particular, as far as we are concerned, about museums of contemporary art. Historians and art critics, sociologists and semiologists, politicians, journalists, architects and specialists of exhibiting institutions, sponsors, dealers often busy themselves seriously and productively with this problem. But it is still pretty rare to hear about the specifically esthetic problems to do with the relationship between the works of art and the exhibiting space. In other words one tends to speak above all of the container, of its objectives and functions, taking for granted the content. The point of view of the artists on this point seems important to me. What do you think about this?

DONALD JUDD: The museum, the 'container', has developed separately from its contents and at best has the relationship of the tin can to the soup. Usually the 'container' is antithetical to the 'content'. The main problem is that contemporary museum architecture is affected or appalling at the worst and so is inimical to art, which has to be honest.

We still have a new industrial society in its beginning. Evidently it needs communal institutions with some claim to spiritual concerns and by chance museums are acquiring this role. This is the

first time in history that an attempt has been made to isolate art. This is a terrible distortion. It's asking too much of art to be a religion, which now is primarily the information of science, and too little of art not to be interesting everyday and everywhere. Most things happen by accident and continue by convention. The contemporary art museum is one of the most unusual and unlikely of these developments in this century and one of the most rapid. Every city has to have one, as they once had to have cathedrals. Obviously these symbolize culture. They are serious financial efforts. But no one has thought much about them. Their function isn't clear, perhaps to educate, perhaps to collect, mostly just to symbolize. The money has already gone to the bad architecture that degrades its justification; the museums are little support for the art that justifies them. The museum has developed from the collecting of the European nobility, and whether this activity is useful now or even enjoyable is debatable. Also the museums are chronically behind, slowed by art history and uncertain whether they are past or present, so that they are seldom suitable for contemporary art and almost never represent it well.

Museums and art centers are great exploiters of artists; they build fancy buildings and then plead poverty on exhibitions and purchases. They are not interested in supporting art. Money to them will not go to artists. It will only be used to exploit for education what the artists have already done with difficulty on their own. Institutions trust institutions.

The museums are charities that are monuments to the rich. The increase in the number of museums is evidently not so much an increase in interest in contemporary art as it is an increase in an idea of monuments. As a monument the building is crucial and not its contents. Whether private, partially public, or public, a museum is run by its benefactors and everything goes downhill from there. The museums are always doing artists the favor of showing their work. It's an honor to be associated with the company and don't ask for a raise. Museums want to be given work or pay very little because, after all, you're the suppliant. There's almost no sign of support or interest in getting work done. If any purpose is mentioned it's that the museums are educating the public. Museums are show business paid for by the artists and the dealers.

F.P.: You published an interesting text in the catalogue of Documenta 7 of Kassel: *On Installation*. You say that art can be seen in four situations: private collectors' houses, art galleries, public exhibition spaces and museums. Can you clarify here the differences which characterize these four places where the work of art exists, being particularly precise about those aspects regarding museum collocation?

D.J.: These four situations would make four large chapters in a book, which I'm trying to write. The *Installation* article discusses these briefly.

The installation and context for the art being done now is poor and unsuitable. The correction is a permanent installation of a good portion of the work of each of the best artists. After the work itself, my effort for some eighteen years, beginning in a loft on Nineteenth Street in New York, has been to permanently install as much work as possible, as well as to install some by other artists. The main reason for this is to be able to live with the work and think about it, and also to see the work placed as it should be. The installations provide a considered, unhurried measure by which to judge hurried installations of my own and others in unfamiliar and often unsuitable places.

The collector's home should be fairly harmless but almost always the architecture is awful and the art extremely crowded. There are few collectors and even fewer persons who have only two or three things. Usually the art gallery doesn't look so bad, though trite, but it's the showroom of a business. Small portable work sells best, not large work that is nearly made in place. And the shows are temporary. Anyway, business shouldn't determine the way art is seen, although most of my work has been shown first in galleries, the best made and the best installed in Leo Castelli's three spaces.

Art in a public space is a recent result of public money. At this point, art is art and is neither public nor private, so 'public art' is a misnomer. 'Public', practically, means the application of many extraneous worries to the art, which favors willing mediocrity. Some large good pieces by intractable artists have been made and they are among the public, which is desirable, but the locations are invariably appalling. These three categories, aside from the important economic activity of the gallery and a few large pieces in public, fail to produce serious results. If somewhere there were serious and permanent installations, the ephemeral exhibitions of the gallery and the awful environments of the work in public could be criticized and endured.

I bought a building in New York in 1968, which contains my work and that of others, and two buildings in Texas in 1973, which contain my work. One building in Texas has two large rooms and the other has one. Each of the two took two years of thinking and moving pieces around. The one room took about a year. One of the two rooms was the basis for the installations in the exhibition of my work at the National Gallery of Canada in 1975, which occupies part of an office building and so has fairly plain, decent space. None of my work that's installed is lent nor is that by other artists. Permanent installations and careful maintenance are crucial to the autonomy and integrity of art, to its defense, especially now when so many people want to use it for something else. Permanent installations are also important for the development of larger and more complex work.

F.P.: A bad collocation (still your own words) doesn't ruin a good work but it tends to reduce the possibility of a correct esthetic reading. One can intuitively perceive that the work has quality but it is difficult to understand why. How much then does the interrelationship between the work and physical space in which it exists condition the quality of the artist's production?

D.J.: Nothing should condition the quality of the artist's production. Installation anywhere is after the work of art is made. The rest is considered in the article. Bad installation does not alter the 'correctness of the esthetic reading'. It reduces the understanding of the work of art almost to just information, correct but meager. Lack of time, intrinsic to museums, does the same.

F.P.: It is important for all artists to see their works well displayed. But for artists of the 60's and 70's who like you realize their artistic ideas through constructions often of noteworthy dimensions the problems become more complex. In your own case, what are the ways in which you work?

D.J.: This again is too large to answer. I work in a range from small pieces on the wall or floor which may or may not be seriously affected by their circumstances to large pieces indoors or outdoors moderately related to where they are, to large pieces indoors or outdoors in plywood, metal or concrete which are very closely adjusted to their environment.

F.P.: The museum can be a neutral space, a 'pure container', or strongly characterized from the architectural point of view. For example, the Castello di Rivoli in an historical sense, for its baroque architecture, or on the other hand a new museum like that in Stuttgart designed by Stirling, where the impact of the architect is very evident. Your minimalist work elaborated through primary cold rational and serial structures seems closer to a functionalist dimension of architecture. In your text, cited above, you discuss the Beaubourg in Paris defining it an expensive monster lacking in proportion, a type of romanticizing of a petrol refinery in order to gain spectacular effects. What is your opinion of contemporary art museum architecture; what, according to you, are the right criteria the designers should keep to in order to respect and to give full advantage to the content formed by the works of art?

D.J.: An example of two good museums are Kahn's: the Kimbell and the British Art Centre at Yale. The criteria for a good building is not very different from that of a good work of art – not that the

two are the same thing – a mistake architects make in their complete failure to be 'creative'. First, it's necessary to think, or as Yevgeni Baratynsky said: 'Thought is the test of imagination'. This includes everything: function, materials, appearance, cost, suitability to the location etc. For example, the site of the new Wallraff Richartz Museum as well as the Römisch-Germanisches Museum in Köln are violations of the Cathedral Ostentatious material insult the art they surround, which is usually made in poverty, and also the public not so rich. Confusion, as in Hollein's museum in Mönchengladbach, insults intelligence. Foolish panache insults the world. Usually buildings should be plain, simple and clear in plan. Anything more than that should be human, not aggressive, as almost all museums are.

There is no neutral space; that's a myth. Badly made and proportioned space is not even space; it's bad. Using the Castello di Rivoli is a fine idea; for the most part, leaving it alone is a good idea. The big mistake is the elevator and stairway driven through the court, a current cliché, ostentatious, 'creative', and precious in relation to the old architecture, as Carlo Scarpa's renovations are. I've said many times 'minimalist' means nothing to me. My work is art. No art is 'cold' and 'rational'. In fact I'm against the division of rational and irrational. What is 'primary'? Art has no function as architecture does; that's the main difference.

F.P.: Should the museum be a place of peace or of war for the works which it houses and exhibits to the public? In other words which should prevail, the criterion of conservation or that, more dynamically, of a continuing active cultural stimulus (or if you prefer cultural provocation)? Doesn't the legitimization and conservation of a work of art as performed by the museum, in that it is the official body of cultural ideology, risk embalming the vital function of artistic work?

D.J.: It's nonsense that the museum and the work it contains should be at war. That's thoughtlessness. We have plenty of war; we need peace. It's peace that requires thought and is constructive. War is only the usual confusion and stupidity raised to violence. 'Cultural provocation' is cant. The sentence is a false choice. I think museums or anyone should take care of a work if they acquire it. We don't have to worry about 'cultural ideology'. No government now is capable of thinking enough to make one. Ideologies virtually happen by accident, low taste and economic expediency.

F.P.: The director of a museum, following precise choices and carrying out a personal strategy in the overall preparation of exhibition spaces, definitely performs a critical and creative activity. In what position must the artist be placed regarding him? Are there risks of passive subjection?

D.J.: It's a good director who does this. He should benefit the art and try to understand that activity, which after all he lives from. All institutions want the artist to be passive; the artist must never be passive. The price for that is great.

F.P.: With regards to the works of other artists present in the same spaces of the museum what is the most correct way to guarantee the autonomy of each work and to contribute at the same time with this in giving the public the best overall view of contemporary artistic research?

D.J.: The works of different artists should look well together. That takes a lot of thought and common sense. Generally works from different categories, painting and sculpture, do not go well together. Paintings and reliefs or three-dimensional works on the same wall are usually disagreeable. Mainly installation should be sparse, and everything have lots of room. Educating the public is not much of a purpose. The overall historical view could be consigned to a good book.

F.P.: How much has the possibility of working for museums contributed to the qualitative

development of your work? That is, is it only a question of opportunities for getting your works better known or can one also talk of a real contribution towards a better art?

D.J.: Museums are not a contribution. They are a liability. They live from the real work done elsewhere. The assumption that I would work for a museum is shocking. As I've written, very little of what has been done is visible in museums. Simply physically they are inadequate. The attitudes of the architecture belong to another world from those of art. Most museum personnel are also in another world.

Per Kirkeby

FRANCESCO POLI: A museum compared with any other cultural institution is a place having a very special identity. Its importance and fascination are closely connected to the functions of collecting, keeping and exhibiting historically, culturally and artistically important objects and documents. Everything which physically and concretely inhabits the rooms of museums lives in an autonomous spatial and temporal dimension, suspended, and, in a certain sense, absolute compared with the external world. Even if we are aware that the 'performance' of the museum, like that of the theatre, has to be the fruit of very clever scenography, this does not impair (on the contrary in the best cases it exalts) the exceptionality of the system of expectations which regulates our attention as visitors. These are general observations but I believe they are of value especially for museums of figurative art. And in this sense it seems interesting to me to know what the artist's perception of a museum is, with what eyes does he look at these spaces (which for him are not only to visit but also to occupy with his own work possibly).

PER KIRKEBY: In order to answer your question I must above all think of our customs at home when I was a boy. I have to think of the first time I went to a museum: it was the ethnographic museum of Copenhagen. It wasn't a very well arranged museum being very old-fashioned and full of strange things but I loved this, it enchanted me. I began early on to go also to figurative art museums like the national museum in my city too. Now it's been completely done up but then it was stylistically very old. I was very happy. I loved those visits. I remember one episode in particular when I was eleven or twelve years old: walking alone through the various galleries of the museum I was strongly impressed by the presence of the works of art in that spatial atmosphere. That experience has remained imprinted in my memory, so much so as to be, for certain aspects, fundamental for my idea of a museum.

I think that a museum is a place where people can sometimes be capable of having important experiences, experiences of profound existential meaning. I don't want to say that everyone has to become an artist, that would be too much, but I do think that even things like this can change people's habits for the better. This is one reason for having museums.

F.P.: But is it still possible to have this type of individual experience nowadays with the museum public continually increasing?

P.K.: The position of museums was different in the past to what it is now. The idea that they should educate people existed even then, but from the 60's on there has been this move to get as many people as possible into them, under the pretence of a democratic conception of culture, too often distorted or only superficially understood. An excessive number of indiscriminate people risks preventing the single person from having important and intense experiences, reducing the pleasure of seeing the works with the necessary calm and concentration. I think that a museum, and especially an art museum, should be to a certain extent exclusive. Society must be capable of

understanding that there is a relatively reduced public far museums; a public that goes to the museum of its own choice and not only to see something which it has already seen on television or has already read about in the newspapers.

F.P.: What difference is there, from an architectural point of view, between contemporary museums and those of the last century like the museum of Thorvaldsen (to take another example from Copenhagen) which was built for a single artist during his lifetime?

P.K.: It is rather a pretentious museum. I don't normally like museums dedicated only to one artist, but this one is unique for its architecture. Thorvaldsen's work has always interested me even if his plaster casts and replicas in marble are very cold works with which it is difficult to make contact. Even before becoming an artist I had always liked this museum for its uniqueness. I especially like the collection of paintings taken from sculpture which is arranged in a series of small rooms. It is a typical collection of those times and interesting even if not all the paintings are good. Each room is decorated, but these decorations don't detract one's attention from the paintings. This kind of room, very beautiful, is a model which could be taken up again by the modern architects. The type of museum which I love must conserve something of those of the last century: normal rooms, solid walls, natural light which comes in through windows, as the Thorvaldsen museum. When I was young there wasn't any electric light, it was very dark and it was difficult to see the paintings which often seemed to be very mysterious. On other days the sun shone and everything seemed completely new. Today, when the architects talk things over with the artists they become mad and say 'you don't need an architect'. Because, when you ask for a normal room with natural light, you don't need an architect according to them. But museums like the one we have talked about show that the architect can intervene on the floors, on the ceilings, wherever he wishes, just so long as he is sensitive towards the works of the artists. On the contrary, very often the architects don't worry excessively about the works, about their particular characteristics. In a certain sense they are very modern, because the modern interest for art is directed not so much towards the single works as to the overall tendencies, to the fashions, to the movements. But I am very old-fashioned: according to me art is enjoyed in the wrong way nowadays because the interest for the whole prevails too much in respect of the attention for the single work.

F.P.: So in reality do you think that contemporary museum architects want to put themselves too much in the limelight without bothering to respect the works of the artists?

P.K.: Yes, this is part of the problem. I want to say that today you can do the most mad and fantastic things planning museum spaces. Even in the new part of Stuttgart museum, designed by Stirling and which seems quite sober overall, there are still problems. There are very simple spaces, but there is always something on the walls and it is very difficult to concentrate: the rooms seem to be quite normal, it all seems easy, but in the moment when you come to look at the things from close-up you realize that it is not by any means easy. There are things like the sense of proportion and other small points which condition the installation.

F.P.: In the world there are different kinds of contemporary art museum, for levels of importance and for criteria of orientation, but often the results are choices much too conformist, much too linked to the standardized paths of contemporary art. This greatly conditions the specific identity which each museum must have. What is your point of view on this?

P.K.: As far as I know, the actual conception of art museums is not very old. First there were the collections belonging to the kings, to the popes, to the powerful families etc. And these collections

became the basis of the museums; in the past they weren't museums as we think of them today, they were just collections open also to the public. Especially after the second world war the situation completely changed: totally new institutions were founded to collect the works of those artists who were thought would represent the history of art. That of the museums is a very difficult problem; to be honest I don't have a true reply. Personally, as I've already said, I think that museums should continue to be a bit old-fashioned. This means also to say that in some way we must turn back to the idea of a collection. The collection was made above all by a single person or by institutions, but the basic idea and taste was one, was coherent. Whereas nowadays if you speak to a director of a modern museum he will hardly ever say what he prefers, but he will defend the politics of pluralist choices, in order to offer the public a bit of everything.

F.P.: What do you think of the relationship between time and art as far as the choices of contemporary art museums are concerned?

P.K.: I understand the problem, it's a good question. It's a point that needs to be taken further into consideration. The museum cannot be a testimony to everything that has been done in the ambit of artistic research. The museum can only give a partial picture of what has happened and what is happening. For example, I find that it is a great mistake to try and exhibit the works of the Fluxus group or those of the artists of the happenings, because what they did was closely connected to the time of their realization. And at that time they were extremely important things, perhaps more important than the majority of paintings and sculptures realized in the same years. Nevertheless it seems right to me to document these experiences in books, not in museums. One tries to give the sense of the happening through documentation, but the result is a bit like a cemetery. You have to know everything already before going to these artistic manifestations, while for paintings, sculptures, installations it is a question of something fundamentally visual which you can look at without knowing much about the process of production. I know that it is not exactly like this, but in most cases a good inclination towards esthetic perception is sufficient.

F.P.: From the problem of time to that of space. Many artists - Minimal, Land Art, Arte Povera - have worked on natural terrain and in urban spaces with installations and interventions. Does the fact that all this is now found in a museum represent a contradictory fact, or does it enter, however, as a contrast, into the logic of this research?

P.K.: For the majority of these artists, perhaps for all of them, there is a particular way of thinking the work for the museum. Doing the work is a way of answering questions. Then there are specific differences. For example, an artist like Paolini has always worked in agreement with the museum (more than that, one can say that the museum is material peculiar to his work). For other artists, like for example Serra, it is to a certain extent a paradox: many of these artists began as a reaction to the museum, but paradoxically the only real place for them is the museums. In the 60's to be only a painter, as I was, seemed very old-fashioned. But I have always thought that the painter can work extremely freely, even against the museum. The painting can be hung wherever you want.

F.P.: What do you think about the function of the market in connection with the development of art? Is it a conditioning or a stimulus to artistic research? Is there a connection between the market and contemporary art museums?

P.K.: From the moment that there is art in the western world the art market exists, in different forms; nowadays there are no longer the patrons of the past but there are the dealers. In Denmark there aren't any important dealers; there are groups of artists who exhibit and sell their paintings

once a year. This is considered to be a very democratic system, but it's very boring for art and doesn't produce interesting results. I seriously believe that art needs a system that stimulates competition and selection. This compels artists to make innovative and precise choices in order to assert their work through a tight comparison.

The structure of a museum has links with the art market, but in indirect terms. Not in the way it is stated by those who have this opinion. The market serves to experiment new things. The museum is like a theatre where the best works are put on view, that is ones not consumed, but exalted by time.

F.P.: What effect does it have on you to see your paintings in museums? Is it different compared to being hung in galleries or in private collections?

P.K.: It depends. There are some galleries which have a better reputation than many museums; there are some private collections where it is very important to be represented. When I was a boy, to be present in a museum meant being a great artist. For me it has been important to see my works exhibited in the museum of my city, even though it is not a very significant museum for contemporary art. When your paintings are in a museum they acquire, in a certain sense, a historical value. I'm not really sure that it's like this, but anyway I'm happy that they are there.

F.P.: What is your opinion of Castello di Rivoli and of the overall orientation of the collection?

P.K.: The Castello di Rivoli is very beautiful, because of its architecture, its decorations, the rooms which have perfect spaces for large works and installations, even if I prefer to produce smaller sized paintings: small paintings can have greater intensity and quality than works of large dimensions.

What I like particularly about old buildings like the Castello are the powerful walls which have a function in the structure of the building: they are ideal for hanging paintings, unlike the walls and temporary dividing panels which you find in recently constructed museums. The point is that a wall must 'support' a painting; not to be understood as a problem of physical weight but as a problem of perception and of a not uncertain relationship between space and work.

As far as regards the orientation of the collection of the museum, I think that it is a valid model, without giving any specific value judgements because I am not a critic. One shouldn't be afraid of giving to only one person the task of effecting a public collection, because this does not at all mean benefiting only one single tendency. Indeed at Rivoli there are diverse types of art which in some way are interconnected. They range from minimalists to artists with a strong expressive charge, but in spite of that one can perceive an idea underlying it all, an underline. In looking at things it is not necessary to follow preconceived stylistic ideas, but to look for something which might be difficult to define and which must rather be perceived emotionally.

F.P.: A last question. How do you see the situation of museums in Italy?

P.K.: They are always closed. But joking apart, it appears to me that there aren't many good contemporary art museums. And this is strange because there are, on the contrary, many good artists of the latest generations and it would be wonderful to be able to see well-arranged collections of contemporary Italian art.