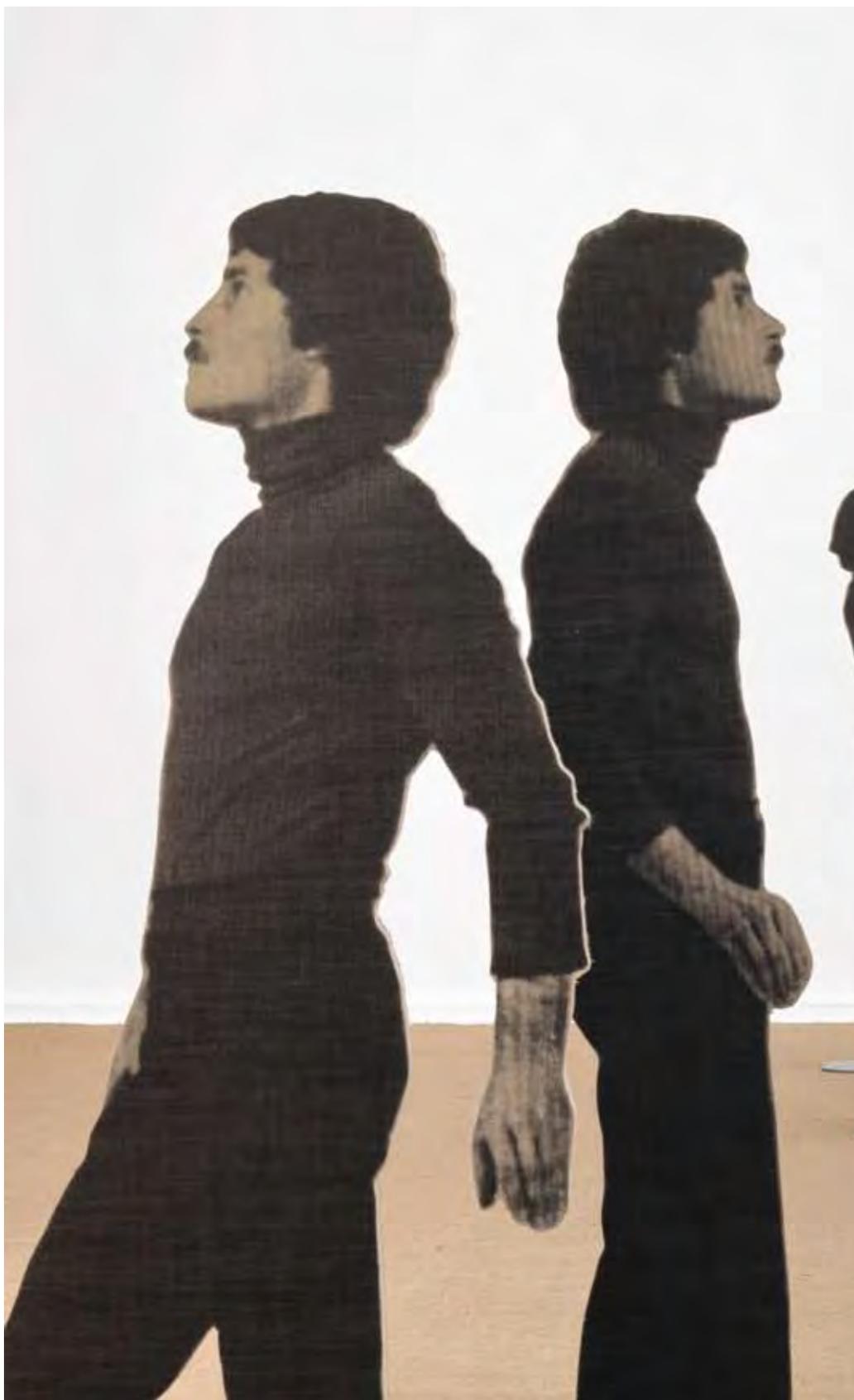


The End_{of} Post Modernism

Tate Triennial

The fourth instalment of the Tate Triennial promises to evoke debate. Curated by Nicolas Bourriaud, he introduces a new art term *Altermodern*, which describes how artists are responding to the increasingly global context in which we live.

The contemporary art critic Louisa Buck stated, in 2000, that not only do artists themselves shy away from change but that “there are a great many dealers, curators and critics who do not venture out of their appointed places.” The upcoming Tate Triennial will hopefully, roughly nine years after this statement was made, change the validity of that argument by venturing outside its own parameters as an institutional exhibition of artists. Nicolas Bourriaud, art critic, curator of the Triennial, and founding director of the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, is leaving the safety net of post-modernism and embracing the



David Noonan. Installation view, *Chisenhale*, 2008. Dimensions variable. © the artist. Courtesy of Hotel, London.





Left: Shezad Dawood Production Still from *Feature* 2008. Copyright Shezad Dawood, and courtesy of Paradise Row, London.

Below: Marcus Coates, *Firebird, Rhebok, Badger and Hare* 2008. Photograph by Jo Ramirez. Courtesy the artist and Workplace Gallery. Copyright the artist, 2008.



possibilities that exist outside the traditional art-historical framework. The Tate Triennial will showcase this new strand of thought, that of the "Altermodern."

The Altermodern, as coined by Bourriaud, assumes the end of post-modernism. He argues that though post-modernism has an inherent value, it is no longer necessarily relevant in today's world. There is a pervasive fear of the shifting dynamic of society and global culture; of the unfamiliar allegiances and relationships that are being created that negate the idea of a sole, identifiable origin. Post-modernism, according to Bourriaud, was obsessed with this idea of the artist's origin and how culture, traditions, and geographical biography played a part in their work. The artists chosen for the Tate Triennial "are starting from

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a globalised state of culture — not anymore working as logotypes of their own culture, or their own tradition. The question is not anymore where are you coming from but where are you going to?" The exhibition includes artists such as Subodh Gupta, Tacita Dean, and Gustav Metzger, and examines how their work fits into, and is emblematic of, this theory of the Altermodern.

"It's going to be the first international show at the Tate Britain, in some ways, but a show about London made of three different types of artists: UK born, residents, and passer-bys. It's really based on what London is today." Bourriaud is drifting away from the organisation principles of exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale, which focuses on the country of origin of the artist and how this acts as a defining factor in an artist's work. This can be problematic and delimitating, especially when the majority of exhibiting artists are not necessarily born in, or relate to, the traditions and cultures of their birth. Bourriaud avoids this by choosing artists from a global and macrocosmic viewpoint; he looks at how

they function and interrelate within the world and how this is reflected in their

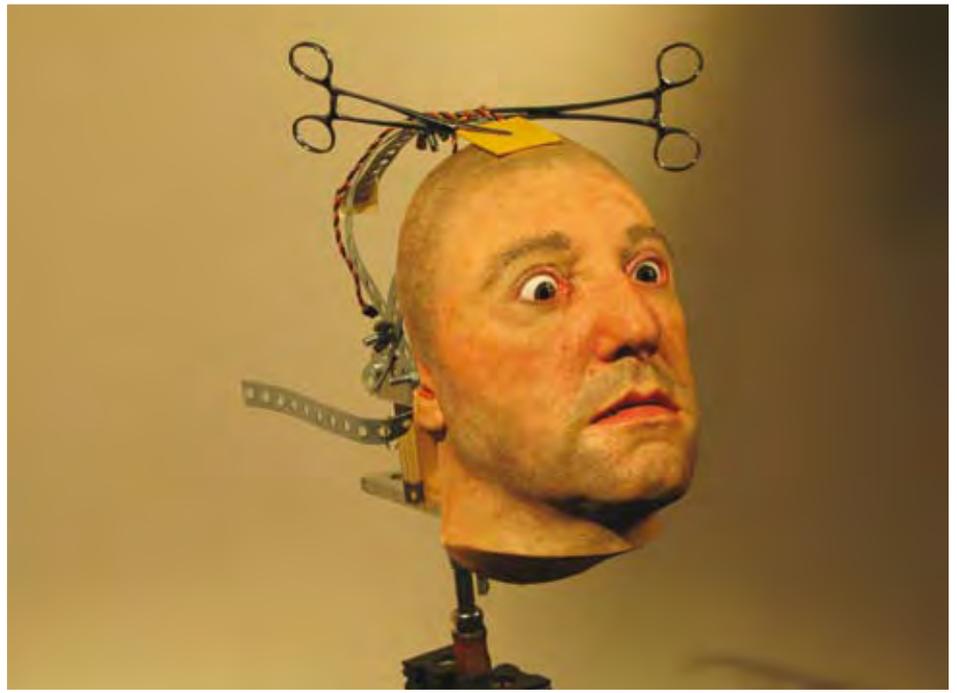
work rather than how their work is a direct reflection of their identity. The exhibition manages to maintain a focus on London in parallel to this global focus: "It's not the binary opposition between the two [local and global], but the constitution of trajectories and itineraries which is actually leading to a kind of new photographic vision of art and of the world itself." This new vision is that of the Altermodern: for Bourriaud, a lens through which artists are negotiating and exploring the past and using art as the vehicle to do so, whilst still maintaining a concrete position in the present.

Bourriaud references the idea of the "journey" often when discussing the exhibition and altermodernity; it is an important theme to keep in mind when examining the current state of contemporary art and the art world. There is a tentative movement occurring in terms of thoughts, ideas, and tangible entities, a movement which Bourriaud relates back to globalisation and the technological advances that are creating new pathways from which to explore culture and tradition: "Artists are building, what I call, journey-forms, which is a combination of, a way to exchange, time and space values." These new "journey-forms" are a method of exchange and communication, able to exist only within the parameters set forth by a new modernity. The Triennial is intrinsic to the development of these intellectual thoughts and theories and he utilises it as a conduit with which to explore these themes.

The format of the exhibition and the events leading up to the opening, necessarily instigate debate and breed an atmosphere of excitement around the triennial. The four prologues, the fourth and final of which occurred 17th January 2009, has extended the course of the exhibition to that of a year and opened up an unmitigated temporal window for discussion. Bourriaud views the prologues as a way of exposing and

Right: Nathaniel Mellors, *Giantbum 2008* (animatronic sculpture in production). Courtesy of the artist, Matt's Gallery, London and ZINGERpresents, Amsterdam. © the artist.

Below: Charles Avery, *Untitled (Two Triangleland Bourgeoisie studying the head of an Aleph)*. 2008. 37 x 54 cm. Pencil on Paper. © Charles Avery.



Left: Spartacus Chetwynd, *Hermito's Children, TV Pilot 2008* (promotional material). © the artist.

documenting the intellectual process of an exhibition and involving the artists, critics, and academics, not only as witnesses but contributors to the Triennial. The prologues conquer, in a way that Bourriaud himself could not alone, the intellectual territory left open to criticism by the introduction of the Altermodern as the basis and framework of the exhibition. "The stakes were very high when I arrived...I didn't look back preparing this exhibition, but I tried to change its form, its shape, by the prologues. The different states and the different elements that constitute it, in a way. That was more or less my mission here." The prologues have flipped the natural course of curatorial and academic debate on its head, for rather than the usual course of development in which the exhibition occurs and consequently talks and debates transpire during and after in response, Bourriaud has asked his audience and participants to debate the concept before its visual and actual realisation. This necessarily opens up the exhibition to a series of tangential discussions that serve to bolster the conceptual arrangement rather than act as a hindrance to its intellectual development.

It would be difficult to deny that dealing with a major institution and an exhibition on this scale would be painless or straightforward. Bourriaud is quite forgiving of the process though, calling it a "fruitful collaboration" between himself, the Tate, and all the players involved. One imagines him at the centre of a web, being pulled from every which way, straining against the different requirements and decisions to be made: he is dismissive of that vision and argues, quite simply, that "You have to find a way to deal with the institution and keep your freedom inside of it."

He is sure to face criticism for the exhibition, as did his predecessor

Beatrice Ruf of the 2006 Tate Triennial. Undoubtedly, as with any major exhibition at a key institution, this is to be assumed and expected. One gets the sense though, when speaking with Bourriaud, that he almost courts criticism, that he views debate as the impetus of the show: "Maybe we really need a new modernity, but maybe it's not this one. It was conceived as a big debate. The term Altermodern delimitates the zone of discussion, I would say. In the beginning, it was more like a dream catcher, but it filled itself with the different prologues, with the different discussions I had, with the different artists' contributions also. Now it's getting more and more complete: the picture is appearing: the purpose of this exhibition is to make a picture appear." The picture Bourriaud speaks of is inherently slightly vague, thereby allowing critics, philosophers, artists and historians, to pick away at the edges and discover the fault-lines in which *real* artistic debate can occur. Bourriaud is, to a critic such as Buck, the curator as vanguard and pioneer.

Altermodern: Tate Triennial 2009, runs from 3 February – 26 April 2009 at Tate Britain. Please view the website at www.tate.org.uk for further details.

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