

## Seminário de Metodologia de Investigação

### Min(d)ing the museum:

Registo | observação | *realismo* no Museu Malhoa



### excertos para discussão

Seminário de Metodologia de Investigação  
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## a ler enquanto se percorrem as salas do museu

Do *Incidente no Museu ou a Música Aquática* de Ilya Kabakov

O interior da galeria reconstitui duas salas de um velho museu de sólida reputação, comparável ao Louvre ou à National Gallery. As paredes de uma das salas estão pintadas de vermelho escuro, as da outra num requintado verde amêndoa. Por baixo do tecto, um friso branco esculpido. A parte inferior das paredes está forrada com painéis de madeira escura. Uma dezena de belos quadros clássicos, de cor sombria (1,20 x 1, 70 m ), emoldurados a dourado ou a negro estão pendurados na parede. Como acontece sempre nos museus de arte antiga, a iluminação é suave, velada, dirigida para as obras de arte. Nas duas salas, cadeiras e canapés convidam à contemplação das pinturas num ambiente de recolhimento e serenidade. Infelizmente, naquela manhã, teve lugar um incidente bastante desagradável. Os funcionários preparavam-se para destrancar e abrir as portas ao público, quando se aperceberam de que o chão das duas salas estava inundado e que a água continuava a cair de vários pontos do tecto. Ou o telhado não resistira a uma chuva diluviana ou os vizinhos de cima se tinham esquecido de fechar a torneira. Fosse o que fosse, o tecto impregnado de água ameaçava ruir, e o soalho encerado começava a inchar e a deformar-se. É fácil imaginar o que aconteceria às obras de arte naquelas condições.

Tomaram-se as primeiras medidas de urgência. As cadeiras foram dispostas em círculo à volta dos pontos particularmente perigosos e estendeu-se por cima um plástico, no meio do qual se fez um buraco que escoava a água para dentro de baldes colocados por baixo. Nos sítios onde a fuga de água não era tão importante, puseram-se jarros de vidro, baldes, bacias, enfim, tudo o que estava à mão.

Subitamente, o silêncio das salas do museu sofreu uma transformação. As divisões antigas, mergulhadas na penumbra, encheram-se de uma música bizarra : a música da água a cair. O ruído dos esguichos de água, das gotas, fundia-se numa polifonia complexa a que se misturavam os baixos dos fiozinhos de água a bater no plástico, esticado como uma pele de tambor, o retinir das gotas que tamborilavam ao cair nos baldes de ferro, o *staccato* dos jarros de vidro e as pancadas ritmadas contra a grande bacia de folha.

Limpou-se o chão e os empregados saíram. Os raros visitantes que, aproveitando-se da confusão, se tinham introduzido no museu, deambulavam entre os estranhos e incompreensíveis "objectos" espalhados por todo o lado. Apenas alguns, capazes de apreciar a aliança inesperada da solenidade ambiente e da magia dos sons desconhecidos, foram buscar cadeiras para as instalar à volta dos "instrumentos musicais" e mergulhar, como num concerto, nesse mundo de harmonia um pouco triste, mas ao mesmo tempo superior e cheia de esperança, que aparecera ali de forma tão imprevista.

Compositor: Vladimir Tarasov



Ilya Kabakov | *Incident at the Museum or Water Music* [1992] | 2004 | Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, NY  
[em [http://www.feldmangallery.com/media/pdfs/exhkab92\\_press.pdf](http://www.feldmangallery.com/media/pdfs/exhkab92_press.pdf), último acesso a 25/11/2015]

O conceito subjacente a esta obra é, parece-nos, muito simples. O ponto de vista muda de repente e a catástrofe, a destruição, transformam-se em criação, em construção. A imagem da água, da corrente que tudo destrói à sua passagem, dá lugar a um outro elemento, o fluxo da música, que penetra em tudo e tudo impregna. A destruição de uma situação artística (impossibilidade de contemplar tranquilamente uma obra pictórica) engendra de forma inesperada uma outra criação não menos artística: o aparecimento de uma sala de concerto, dos seus "instrumentistas" e dos seus "ouvintes". Tudo foi invertido, virado do avesso.

Objectos heteróclitos, estranhos àquele lugar - baldes, frascos - cuja presença é impensável, impossível num museu, formam um conjunto perfeito de instrumentos que soam maravilhosamente bem. A água, que era veículo de destruição torna-se o principal instrumento musical. Uma vez transposta para o domínio musical, a queda de água (no sentido descendente) torna-se símbolo de uma harmonia ascendente.

Como é evidente, nada teria acontecido, a música da água não teria sido composta, se não se tivessem reunido quatro condições importantes:

1. Esta transformação só podia ter tido lugar na atmosfera elevada, tensa, de um museu, onde, tal como numa catedral - porque os museus de hoje são catedrais - a nossa alma é preparada para uma experiência sublime. 2. Nesse espaço reuniram-se pessoas susceptíveis de compreender uma tal música, dotadas de um indiscutível ouvido musical, capazes de se abstrair do caos circundante e de sentir a harmonia dos sons que subitamente surgiram. O que não aconteceria num telheiro onde o passante se abriga durante a chuva. E daí...porque não?

3. Esse auditório receptivo, capaz de mudar de objecto de concentração, tinha de ter uma boa cultura musical e uma memória exercitada para ser capaz de estabelecer a relação entre, por um lado, os sons produzidos pela água a cair nos baldes e, por outro, "a conversa das gotas" nas bacias de mármore dos palácios árabes, o murmúrio musicalmente tão estudado das fontes e cascatas dos jardins à francesa e, talvez, a Water Music de Haendel.

4. Nesta instalação inventada de forma totalmente artificial, há todavia um elemento "sério", que nada tem de brincadeira. Trata-se de uma peça composta a partir de sons aquáticos pelo compositor Vladimir Tarasov. Depois de ter estudado estes sons durante muito tempo e de os ter pautado com um grande rigor, criou peças musicais que existem de forma perfeitamente autónoma.

Na primeira sala - sala vermelha - a música interpretada em modo maior, com paixão, cria um ambiente muito activo e, coisa interessante, desenvolve-se também espacialmente : ao passar de um grupo de "instrumentos" para outro, o ouvinte/espectador começa a descobrir uma nova peça musical, enquanto a primeira, à medida que nos afastamos, torna-se um acompanhamento harmonioso desta. De igual modo, a audição da música está ligada ao facto de nos deslocarmos por todo o espaço da instalação e de observarmos cada um dos seus elementos. Assim, o ouvinte pode optar: pode ouvir a música imóvel ou em movimento; os sons estão sempre em harmonia onde quer que nos encontremos.

Na sala pequena - a verde - a música da água reveste um carácter mais íntimo, já que o número de instrumentos é mais restrito. As gotas, muito espaçadas, tilintam nos quatro cantos da sala, o barulho das pancadas contra o plástico é fraco mas tenso; o espaço está repleto de um silêncio que ressoa. O conjunto convida à meditação. Os tempos das duas salas, forte na primeira, piano na segunda, constituem a unidade da instalação no plano musical: o espectador atravessa estados de tensão e de relaxamento, de agitação e de calma.



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Para finalizar, resta dizer algumas palavras sobre os catorze quadros pendurados nas paredes do museu. Foram pintados por um artista fictício, um certo S. Kochelev, exposto com todo o direito neste museu. O texto do catálogo explica de forma rigorosa as suas teorias situando-as no contexto da arte russa do séc.XX.



S. Kochelev | *The Actors Have Arrived* | 1927



S. Kochelev | *Zhiltsova and the Hog Zhenjka* | 1933

## Biografia de Kochelev (extracto)

Sergueï Yakovlevitch Kochelev, filho de um mestre-escola da aldeia de Pokrovskoïe (Barnaoul) muda-se em 1904, após a morte dos pais, para Moscovo, onde é recebido pela família paterna (...). Este jovem provinciano, que praticamente nunca mexera numa paleta, passa brilhantemente no exame que lhe permite frequentar o curso de um dos artistas russos mais conceituados da época, V. A. Serov. O país vive na expectativa de alterações radicais e os estudantes são particularmente sensíveis a esse ambiente. Depois de participar em manifestações revolucionárias, Kochelev e quatro dos seus camaradas são expulsos da escola. Começa então um período de hesitação e de busca da sua própria via artística. No Outono de 1917 Kochelev encontra-se em Paris, para onde tinha ido no ano anterior com o objectivo de se familiarizar com a Escola de Paris. Mas os novos movimentos - cubismo, fauvismo, dadaísmo - não o entusiasma. Segundo as suas próprias palavras, pertence sem reservas ao seu "ídolo" Paul Cézanne, que o levou a descobrir, como a muitos outros, novos horizontes, nomeadamente no domínio da cor.

Regressado ao seu país em 1918, Kochelev dedica-se de alma e coração à renovação da vida artística da jovem república. Faz parte de um grande número de comissões, trabalha como delegado nas exposições do Comité para a Educação, ensina na Escola de Escultura e Arquitectura de Moscovo, rebaptizada VKHUTE MAS (...).

O que há de surpreendente nas ideias e no método pedagógico praticado por Kochelev? Sabe-se que nessa época proliferava uma multidão de movimentos artísticos "de esquerda" ou "radicais" que, cegos pela paixão revolucionária, reclamavam-se detentores da verdade e do direito exclusivo a representar a nova era e "a arte do futuro". A intransigência, a negação dos outros e o sectarismo era comum a todos: os "rayonistas" (Larionov), os "construtivistas" (Rodchenko, Stepanova), os "suprematistas" (Malevitch) e outros. Kochelev propunha a sua maneira pessoal, totalmente original de pintar, a que a crítica chamava "sintetismo" - da palavra síntese - embora Kochelev evitasse sempre esta palavra nas suas aulas. Este método consistia em não excluir nenhum problema ou objectivo da prática artística (o que faziam à época todos os colegas de Kochelev), mas pelo contrário, em sintetizar, em fundir em conjunto todas as abordagens numa "liga" única, de grande valor artístico. As questões sobre as quais trabalhava separadamente cada artista deviam ser reunidas num contraponto harmonioso, num "nó complexo", segundo a expressão de Kochelev. Nada devia ser posto de lado. Todos tinham direito ao seu lugar: o realismo dos "ambulantes", o formalismo de Cézanne, o "genrismo" de Menzel, assim como o "ar" de Corot. Daí resultaria um certo "quadro ideal", ao qual, na opinião de Kochelev, a arte desde sempre aspirara.



### DADOS BIGRÁFICOS

Ilya Kabakov nasceu a 30 de Setembro de 1933 em Dnepropetrovsk, na União Soviética. Em 1941 seu pai, Iossif, parte para a frente de combate enquanto Ilya e sua mãe são evacuados para Samarkand, no Uzbequistão.

Aos dez anos de idade estuda numa escola especializada em artes plásticas que, devido à guerra, fora transferida de Leninegrado para Samarkand.

De 1945 a 1951 frequenta um colégio de ensino artístico em Moscovo. Em 1951 integra a secção de grafismo da Escola das Belas Artes Sourikov de Moscovo e obtém, em 1957, o seu diploma de ilustrador. A partir de 1956 realiza ilustrações para livros de crianças - mais de cento e cinquenta obras publicadas pelas editoras moscovitas "Derskaya Literatura" e "Malysh" - assim como para



Ilya and Emilia Kabakov | *The Empty Museum* | 2004

*The Empty Museum* is a room-sized installation that makes the exhibition space itself an object of our contemplation. *The Empty Museum* perfectly replicates a painting gallery in a classical museum with dark red walls, wood moldings, and benches for quiet contemplation. On the walls, where one would expect paintings to hang, are pools of light, as if the paintings had just recently been removed. Bach's *Passacaglia*, written for the organ, resounds loudly. An ambiguous state of construction or demise presides, but the overall effect is one of calm and contemplation. The replacement of paintings by music and light draws connections between the space of the museum, the concert hall, and the cathedral. As with many Kabakov installations, the room functions metaphorically as both a manifestation of social institutions and a container within which imagination and creativity endure. Taking the museum as metaphor, the work invites us to reconsider the status of the work of art and the institutions that house it. Known as the leading figure of the Russian art movement of the 1980s known as 'Moscow Conceptualism' Ilya Kabakov, is considered one of the most important artists of his generation. His "total installations" have depicted the gloomy bureaucratic and communal environments of Soviet life while celebrating the survival and strength of the human spirit. Although oftentimes melancholic, these are spaces that tell stories of poetic innocence and fleeting contradictions; places where longing coexists with imagination.

## Remains

They endeavored to gather up the least pieces, if the rage of persecutors had left any rests or reliques.

*Theophilus Gale, The Court of the Gentiles, III, 199, 167.*

Museums, those now ubiquitous treasure-houses of memory, can be seen as repositories of remains, both cult and functional remnants of life past and fragments of lost cultural corpora.<sup>1</sup> Very little of what is preserved, stored, and exhibited in museums around the world today belongs to current practices and beliefs, except as it constitutes the object of the museographic enshrinement itself. We go to museums to look anew at the remains of a life no longer ours: some of it buried in traces of our collective memory, some only in the remains of other memories, or of memories definitively lost. But what are "remains?"

Literally speaking, remains constitute a "surplus." They were "set aside"—left over—but also were not consumed; they are, therefore, resistant to absorption, on the one hand, and resilient, on the other. Orange peel, cheese rind, or a chicken carcass last longer in their natural forms than the edible flesh of which they were originally a part. They last longer because they were discarded. In Italian, "discarded" (*scartato*) carries the additional meaning of "unwrapped," which is related to "skinned," and in its strongest, most-extreme form, "flayed" (the flayed carcass of Marsyas, as in the extraordinary painting by Titian in Prague, is also "remains"). But the remains are mostly fur and bone, whereas what is consumed (transformed into energy and destroyed) is found between the skin and the skeleton—what French physical anthropologists call *le: parties molles*. Yet, as a symbol, remains are ambivalent because they encompass what is discarded and left over, but also, in some cases, what one keeps (or doesn't spend), a sort of "capital" to be preserved and treasured.

1. This editorial is the slightly modified text of a talk delivered at the Museum of Contemporary Art of the City of Bordeaux, in March 1993. I wish to thank its Director, Michel Bourel, for his many kindnesses at the time, as well as Remo Guidieri, who organized the colloquium "Gerer le reste. Creation et museographisation de l'objet esthetique a la fin du XXe siècle," of which it was part. I am also grateful to Marina Berio for a first draft of the text's translation into English: Gini Alhadeff and Cynthia Elmas helped me to revise its present form.

There may then be a relation (if covert and implicit) between this discarded entity, which is the unconsumed remains, and what is set aside, discarded-through-treasuring we might say, which is the "art object," particularly in its museographed condition. In other words, we may also see a sacrificial aspect in this connection between remains and the museographed object ("inscribed in the place of Muses")—this thing that we separate (or "make sacred") from objects of our daily private or collective use: the implements, the technological objects, and also the flow of "media objects," including the information bytes now widely exchanged through computers.

One way to approach this question is from the point of view of "offerings"—of ambrosia for the gods—because, after all, aren't art collections in our museums also an avatar of these? As a child, I was intrigued by tales of great sacrificial roasts—of which immortals got nothing but the smoke—and by popular tales, such as that of the freeloading Medieval vagrant who made his bread more appetizing by *smelling* the meat being cooked at an inn (and, when confronted, acquitted himself by producing the *sound* of a coin). Smell, sound: impalpable matter, as both message and messenger, stands for a transfer (or translation) of substance (not just of information) from one domain to another. Significant aspects of the question of remains center on this "transubstantiation," this bodily shifting of realms. The question could be formulated as follows: what do remains become when their status changes, and, as offerings, do they adopt the role of soul carriers, or of substitutes for the *living* body?

"Come poor remains of friends, rest on this Rocke . . ." we find in Shakespeare (*Julius Caesar*, V, v, 1), but remains, generally, are bound to eternal rest: debris opposite to living totality. One speaks of "mortal remains" in the sense that the soul is no longer there: "Rest of their bones and soules deliverie," says John Donne (*Holy Sonnets*, X, 8). Something essential has escaped, shattering the unity, the fullness of being. Nearly fifty thousand years of funerary procedures have tackled this problem in myriad ways that go from utter preservation to extreme dispersion (dissolution). This contradiction brings into evidence the fact that remains—be they a corpse or a work in a museum—no matter how carefully preserved, no matter how thoroughly subtracted from "consumption," are

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irreparably perishable, and today the “leftover” object only acquires “world-class” status—as I heard a museum guide at Mantua’s Palazzo del Te call it—through mass-media exposure. Is it an extension of our fear that the separation of the body from consciousness might be definitive? Can the “soul” of a work be preserved once the object is gone?

Its state of decay, its fragmentation and incompleteness, makes of the object/remains into “decadent” things, not only in their funerary and other connotations but also in their being the opposite of classical completeness (perfection). Having grown up in Rome, a statue appears strange and, in a sense, incomplete to me if it does not lack at least an arm, a leg, or even its head. The fragment of a Roman statue is also like the visible remains of a decadence that we have long adopted, in the West, as the only form that can contain everything we do. (In that sense, we are in a civilization that is more than lettered: it is literary—“literature” taken as the privileged and necessary locus of decadence). All the “glories” of the Enlightenment, of science and technology, cannot obscure the fact that for us nothing can really be complete, achieved, therefore truly classical. Something is always left out (unsaid, unshown, unseen), either as absence, foreignness, or as fragment, “remains”: again, a sacred-separated thing, lost to us, a double image, and therefore useless.

An image from my Mexican past appears before my eyes, of a once remote corner of the mountains of Chiapas that has now become the object of intense media interest. The image is that of the cleanliness of the Indian villages in the 1960s, of the total absence of debris, of remains. What wasn’t organic, perishable, and quickly consumed, was too precious as a utensil to be carelessly discarded. Today, in those same villages, glass, tin, and especially plastic implements and containers feed the proliferation of litter. I do not wish to consider what the relation between art and garbage may be (in the present inflation of both), but it may be worthwhile to consider how different the context of “art” was in this earlier world without remains. It was a world in which closed circuits of perishable goods and nondisposable tools could still maintain a precarious condition without growth, or rather, a situation where growth closed in on itself, where instead of aiming to preserve surpluses, one turned them, again and again, into offerings, thus eliminating any chance for real accumulation. This was clearly a world we might call “sacrificial”: a world for which the substitution of bodies could still act as a *metaphor*—“transference,”

in the literal sense—from an “earthly body” into a “celestial body” or a “body of immortality.” In its sacrificial condition, the cult object, forbear of our *objet d’art*, was witness and nonperishable (or less-perishable) guarantor of these transactions. It is as though the object (and in particular, the so-called aesthetic object), became, in the sacrificial relationship, which is a relationship “through death,” that is to say through separation, the receptacle of a “speck of soul,” a fragment of spirit captured in form (as by those famous “soul-catchers” of the sub-Arctic shamans). It would do so by the force of resistance and survival that its formal organization confers on it—the very force, in fact, that gave the utensil its original powers.

In sacrifice, there are no remains and nothing is wasted. This sacrificial circuit—a universe in which destruction is institutionalized, socialized—is a kind of world (*mundus*, also in the sense of “clean,” unsullied, pruned) whose economy (*oikonomia*, or domestic law) were inscribed entirely within the extreme terms of great “parsimony” (hunger) and great “waste” (the orgy, potlach, and feast). What is made sacred in the sacrifice, moreover, is precisely the victim—the victim made into an object (and an offering) and the object exalted to the status of victim (and of offering). In the Christian Mass this ambiguity is still present in the object/host, which is also a complex offering because it deals with a primice (bread, primary product of subsistence), in conjunction with wine, which turns subsistence into a feast (the wasting, spilling of blood). The host is a *symbol* not just because it represents and stands for flesh and blood but because it is bread and the presence of Christ: this symbolic operation—in the literal sense that it brings about a conjunction that is otherwise impossible—in the “sacrifice” of Mass, enacts the nondecomposable, nonanalyzable sacramental mystery of merging presence and absence, immanence and transcendence.

(...)

unrepresentable entities. For two thousand five hundred years, we have been dominated by the representation of inert remains, bodies without soul (something analogous may also have taken place in the Buddhist tradition). But it is, of course, more difficult to determine what the ultramodern destiny of this simulacrum might be today.

In the long transition from sacrificial and “idolatrous” cults to that of obsolescence—in this postindustrial condition of ours, in which the object is as much infinitely reproducible as instantly passé—one is tempted to say that we have moved from ritually operating on the organic body to an adoration of the inorganic that also takes the form of a new cult of remains. It is as if, in our civilization, the progressive severance of matter from form had contributed to the transmutation of the organic offering into an aesthetic object. In the process, a t gradually turns into the presentation of the non-beautiful—from the “especially-not-beautiful,” (the “shocking”), through the “not-so-beautiful,” and all the way to the “not-even-beautiful.”

The aesthetization of the “non-aesthetic” object, a Duchampian discourse to which we have grown accustomed, should perhaps be turned on its head. Could we not say that in its effects, the artistic transfiguration deaestheticizes the object by the same gesture with which it “resacralizes” it, that is to say, makes “art” out of it? The urinal was already a highly aesthetic, or aestheticized thing—an “elegant form”—before Duchamp made it into an object of artistic “adoration,” by “sacrificing” its original function on the altar of art, in the new temple of the *avantgarde* Muses. The formal euphemism of the urinal (also indicated by Duchamp’s title for the “piece”: *Fountain*), is exactly what the artist wishes to both reveal and

deflate by “exposing” the now “useless” implement (quite appropriately, the original *Urinal* in the 1913 Armory Show, mysteriously vanished at the end of that “historical” exhibition: another offering that “went up in smoke.”)

(...)

## Remains

por Francesco Pellizzi

in *Res* :27, 5-10. [excertos com apontamentos pessoais]

How can we describe a situation in which archaic remains—counterparts of a now fragmented nature—are completely cut off from their living roots and float to the surface of our ultramodern sea? Can and must one hope, in the words of Bossuet, that although “*le comble c’est abattu sur les murailles, et les murailles sur le fondement de la construction artistique*,” (“the roof has collapsed onto the walls, and the walls onto the foundation of artistic construction”) yet

*Qu’on remue ces ruines, [et] on trouvera, dans les restes de ce bâtiment renversé, et les traces des fondations, et l’idée du premier dessin, et la marque de l’architecte.*

La Vallière



**Fred Wilson | Mining the Museum | African American history, Exhibitions | Maryland Historical Society**

Item ID: MTM 010

Creator: Maryland Historical Society Exhibition

Description: Metalwork. Slave shackles with silver pieces. Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson. Maryland Historical Society, 1992-1993. Joint exhibition with The Contemporary in Baltimore.

Date of Original: 1992-1993 (exhibit)

Collection: Museum Department



**Fred Wilson | Mining the Museum | African American history, Exhibitions | Maryland Historical Society**

Title: Installation view: Cigar store Indian facing framed photographs.

Subject: Wilson, Fred, 1954-, African American history, Exhibitions, Mining the Museum

Body:

Creator: Maryland Historical Society Exhibition

Description: Cigar store Indian facing framed photographs. Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson. Maryland Historical Society, 1992-1993. Joint exhibition with The Contemporary in Baltimore.



Fred Wilson | Mining the Museum | African American history, Exhibitions | Maryland Historical Society

Item ID: MTM 022

Creator: Maryland Historical Society Exhibition

Description: Right: Pedestals described as Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Benjamin Banneker. Middle: Globe (known as Truth Trophy) ca. 1913. Left: Henry Clay, Napoleon Bonaparte, Andrew Jackson busts. Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson. Maryland Historical Society, 1992-1993. Joint exhibition with The Contemporary in Baltimore.

Date of Original: 1992-1993 (exhibit)

Collection: Museum Department

The viewer is confronted with a Plexiglas case containing a gold-and-silver globe bearing the single word Truth: an old industry award given among advertising "clubs" in the first half of the century. This "Truth Trophy" is flanked on the left by three empty pedestals, labeled "Frederick Douglass," "Harriet Tubman," and "Benjamin Banneker," and on the right by three pedestals supporting marble portrait busts of Henry Clay, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Andrew Jackson. The missing historical figures are all African-American, and all at one point lived in Maryland, yet they are not represented in this ostensibly "local" institution. Meanwhile, the other figures, all white, and none from Maryland, are prominently displayed in appropriately colored stone. Wilson makes clear that the link between historical veracity and the portrayal of history is as tenuous as the connection between truth and advertising.

"Mining the Museum" is filled with such ironies: carved cigar store Indians - as conceived by the nineteenth-century merchants who commissioned them - turn their backs on the viewer to gaze at photographs of actual Native Americans. Slave shackles are insinuated among period silverware.

## MINING THE MUSEUM:

ARTISTS LOOK AT MUSEUMS,  
MUSEUMS LOOK AT THEMSELVES

Lisa G. Corrin

By excavating the site of institutional racism and retrieving forgotten African-American artifacts and heroes, Fred Wilson's "Mining the Museum" brings to light a history and a cultural presence that have been buried beneath layers of neglect and deliberate exclusion. Wilson has culled most of these objects from the permanent collection of the Maryland Historical Society and uses the museum itself as a locus for their presentation, which mimics the usual methods of curatorial selection and museum display: specially painted rooms, silkscreened wall texts, labels, audiovisual material, etc. The objects chosen, and the sly twists of Wilson's juxtapositions, call attention to the biases that normally underlie historical exhibitions, thus subverting and shattering them. In this way, "Mining the Museum" takes a place along side other works that have focused on the meaning of the gallery or museum as both a formal space and an ideological construct. By adding the explosive element of racism, Wilson grafts a cold populist fury onto a now-familiar subgenre of conceptualism. (...)

at the heart of their projects [artists that work critically with museums] is a struggle to redefine art history, erasing the demarcations of gender, race, and class. As such, their effort reflects the larger struggle being played out in society as a whole.

Howard Halle (1993)

tuting objects owned and chosen by veterans still living in the home. Dion's activity transformed a fruitless effort to objectify an essentially unclassifiable group of static objects into a "living" museum in which the remaining veterans and their personal associations played a crucial role.

In 1993, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Ghent presented *Rendez(-)vous*, a series of "curated" mini-exhibitions using a collection of favorite personal objects donated by the local citizenry. In an open invitation, residents of Ghent brought their valued mementos to the museum and told the stories behind the objects. The museum, in turn, offered the objects to artists Ilya Kabakov, Henk Visch, Jimmie Durham, and Huang Yong Ping, who were asked to discover new relationships between the objects through exhibitions of their making. Like other installa-

Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* attempts to address this challenge by examining the ideological apparatus of the museum in general and by exploring how one museum in particular has ignored the histories of people of color. Wilson's method, as an artist-in-residence, was to study closely the Maryland Historical Society's collection of art and artifacts, read extensively in the society's archives, and then install objects of his choosing so as to raise questions about the ways museums represent (or fail to represent) African-Americans and Native Americans. The entire third floor of the society was given over to the installation, which featured well over one hundred objects.

*Mining the Museum* examined how the Maryland Historical Society defines itself and how this self-definition determines whose history has been included (or excluded) in its narrative of Maryland history. It also addressed how those excluded have come to view the museum. The project dealt with the power of objects to speak when the "laws" governing museum practices are expanded and the artificial boundaries museums build are removed. It considered how deconstructing the museum apparatus can transform it into a space for ongoing cultural debate.

Wilson's exhibit represented a departure from the "museumism" genre. For it is one thing to talk about race and museums in an alternative space or a hip commercial gallery, but it is quite another to address it in an established museum by using its own collection and its own history.

Yet these types of projects and installations—*The Museum Looks at Itself* or *The Artist Looks at the Museum*—have formed a veritable movement within museums that students may well find termed "museumism" in the next edition of H. W. Janson's *History of Art*. This genre, "built on the museum's ruins," has increasingly become politically neutralized, now coexisting comfortably within the archetypal white cube it intended to critique.<sup>26</sup> In short, as a result of being called art, acquired for the collection, and exhibited like a Matisse or a Chippendale chair, artwork that laid political and ethical landmines to explode the ideological apparatus of museums is often defused.

Although critical in nature, these museum-based works have had to avoid direct discussion of the relation of a commissioning museum to issues of race, a subject that most museums would prefer to sidestep.

excerpts do texto: Lisa Corrin, 2012, "Mining the Museum: Artists look at museums, museums look at themselves", Bettina Messias Carbonell, (ed.), *Museum studies : an anthology of contexts*. Malden: Blackwell  
[em <[http://www.columbia.edu/itc/anthropology/schildkrout/6353/client\\_edit/week12/corrin.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/anthropology/schildkrout/6353/client_edit/week12/corrin.pdf)>]



**Thomas Struth | Audience 7 | Florenz | 2004 | C-Print, 179,5 x 288,3 cm | Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf**

Says Struth, "I wanted to remind my audience that when art works were made, they were not yet icons or museum pieces." "When a work of art becomes fetishized, it dies." Struth feels the paintings in his museum photographs regain aspects of their original vitality when seen anew in the context he renders so seamlessly. [em <http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/tuchman/tuchman7-8-03.asp#2>]



**Thomas Struth | Audience 7 | Florenz | 2004 | C-Print, 179,5 x 288,3 cm | Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf**

No início da década de 90, Struth inicia uma nova série de fotografias a cores e em grande escala conhecidas como "Fotografias de Museu". Estadias em Nápoles e em Roma, e o contacto com uma cultura em que a pintura e a religião estão intimamente ligadas, inspiraram no artista uma reflexão sobre as variadas funções da arte. Ao iniciar esta série, em 1989, Struth sabia exactamente onde queria ir fotografar: o Louvre em Paris, o Kunsthistorisches Museum em Viena, a National Gallery em Londres, o Rijksmuseum em Amsterdão e o Chicago Institute of Arts. Seguiram-se, em 1995, as fotografias dos visitantes do Altar de Pérgamo, em Berlim.

[do catálogo da exposição em Serralves, 2011-2012]



Grupo de Jovens junto à pintura **A Ronda da Noite** de Rembrandt, 1640 e 1642 pintor do barroco holandês. Rijksmuseum | Amsterdão.



Visitors in front of Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* at the Rijksmuseum. Photograph: Peter Dejong/AP | *The Guardian*, 24/06/2014



**Hello Mona & giant-crowd-trying-to-take-a-photo-of-you.** I was more fascinated by the crowd and number of people trying to take selfies with it. #monalisa #louvre #paris #CheMeetsEurope2015 - See more at: [https://www.igsta.com/media/996272835043748583\\_446492521#sthash.Acvk07Qq.dpuf](https://www.igsta.com/media/996272835043748583_446492521#sthash.Acvk07Qq.dpuf) | Maio 2015



**I don't know why I didn't post this.** Who takes a crowd selfie at the Mona Lisa instead of taking a picture it? Me I guess #louvre #monalisa #thatgirlinthecenterwasallaboutit | [http://www.online-instagram.com/media/885008513565277013\\_29054173](http://www.online-instagram.com/media/885008513565277013_29054173)