

Conversation with  
KRIST GRUIJTHUIJSEN,  
KW Institute of  
Contemporary Art

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I is for

Institute

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What's in a name? This is the question underlying our investigation into ICA: how it came to be, what it means now, and how we might imagine it in the future.

In a field so often defined by precarity, this project is grounded in a spirit of collegiality, a looking outward that aims to facilitate self-reflection. As such, we have engaged colleagues primarily from small- and mid-scale contemporary arts organizations to discuss their institutional histories and how they understand the stakes of their work. The *I is for Institute* website acts as a repository for these ongoing conversations, as well as archival material relating to ICA's history. We thank our many colleagues for their generosity, enthusiasm, and frankness. Their thinking has in turn energized our own.

— Alex Klein,  
Dorothy & Stephen R. Weber  
(CHE'60) Curator, Institute  
of Contemporary Art,  
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KRIST GRUIJTHUIJSEN,  
KW Institute of Contemporary Art

Krist Gruijthuisen is the  
Director of the KW Institute of  
Contemporary Art in Berlin.

With Alex Klein and Tausif Noor

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ALEX KLEIN

What is your position at KW and  
how long have you been there?

KRIST GRUIJTHUIJSEN

I'm Director, and I've been there for two years.

AK

Can you give us a little  
background on the founding of  
KW and its mission?

KG

To give you a short history, Kunst-Werke was, and still is, the official name of the organizing association. It was founded in 1991 right after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It's located in an area that was pretty much unoccupied by anyone since the Wall was set up. From the early 1960s to the late 1980s the streets that ran closest to the Wall were, of course, really not used. There were roughly 50 meters where nothing was allowed to be there. There was always a gap between what was near the Wall and what was actually going to be inhabited. The buildings that were in and around this area were basically abandoned. One of the first buildings that we actually occupied was not this building, but a liquor warehouse on the same street. It's just a little bit more towards the end — or maybe the beginning — of Auguststrasse, depending on where you start. It was very closely connected to the vicinity of Kunsthau Tacheles. Tacheles was a leftist punk theater space. All those spaces were really active when the Wall was up, and they became the places where people would go. The liquor factory was where we did our first show, with Ingo Niermann, who used to be an artist. So, Ingo Niermann did his show and then Joan Jonas did a show.

Klaus Biesenbach, the Founding Director, was part of a group of five other people who were offered this abandoned margarine factory by the property company of Berlin Mitte. In order to organize things, they had to become a *verein* (association) and they started using the bits that were usable. To make a long story short, they worked together for a couple of years and slowly bit-by-bit, Klaus started institutionalizing the space further and further. It became a more established place, as we know it today, within the development of Berlin itself. You could say that KW was definitely on the threshold — maybe even at the heart of darkness — of gentrification in Mitte.

So, in 1992, one of the first things Klaus did was *37 Rooms*. It was during the Venice Biennale and it drew 20,000 people over two weeks. It was a wild success. Thirty-seven curators, 37 spaces around Auguststrasse, and that was, of course, quite unusual in the early 1990s. That kind of put a lot of things on the map, and it also made people see all those spaces that had not been used for 30 or 40 years. People were just moving in there, breaking the locks and living there.

In 1996 they founded the Berlin Biennale, which was a way for Berlin to develop its potential further. And it became, as you know, one of the most groundbreaking biennales worldwide and repositioned a place like Berlin in the scope of a larger, more global conversation. It was tackling things that are globally urgent, but also something that was really simmering within the city.

Basically, the Berlin Biennale slowly became this monster and kind of took over KW. In 1998, we opened an additional space in the back, which is our main gallery space. Klaus believed in globalization and internationalization and everybody in the Institute had to speak English. He did that on purpose, because everything was so deeply rooted within German and German history that he wanted to show that we are a space that communicates worldwide, so therefore, we only speak English. That's why we have this name; KW Institute of Contemporary Art, which is English. One could say, "Why isn't it Kunst-Werke?" The idea of using English was also a way for him to marry with the ICA setup: the idea of a space where it's not only about producing exhibitions, but it's about many other things. It's about production, it's about discourse, it's about research — all of those elements, which he considered under the word "institute."

The only problem is that "institution" or "institute," in, for example, Eastern Europe is something completely different. It's very academic, and we're not academic. There's a very clear misunderstanding. If you communicate such things to the general public it's easier. You could say museum, whether or not we collect, and/or a center and people understand it a little bit better than institute. To the public, it sounds like it's a closed office. You know what I mean? It's a closed space. It's how, at least, in these countries one perceives those names — that definition.

Then, Gabriele Horn came in. She used to be Curator at the Kunsthalle Berlin, which created a political conversation and had to close in 1993. Afterwards, she was working for the Senate, and so she knew all the cultural politics. She was asked by Klaus to take over the executive directorship of the 3rd Berlin Biennale and then the whole institution in 2004, which had these two elements: KW and the Berlin Biennale. The Berlin Biennale might have seemed like an arm of KW at that time, but of course, much bigger.

As the biennial grew much bigger, it basically took over the KW, which is very complicated for an institution; you start competing with yourself, right? You put on a Berlin Biennale hat today, and tomorrow you do it for KW. So, this schizophrenic internal structure, as we all also knew it from the outside, wasn't really feasible in the long term. But it was also one of the reasons that KW was always financially able to pull things together; the Berlin Biennale was one way to make KW survive. With a lot of lobbying and a double increase and subsidy, we were able to divide the institutions and have two directors: Gabriele Horn directing the Berlin Biennale and myself directing KW Institute for Contemporary Art.

This is where we are right now. We are two years into restructuring both these elements, which has been interesting because you have to imagine that when I started, there was no one — all of the previous contracts were finished. We had to literally split everything space-wise and people-wise. We now have double the amount of staff all of a sudden. Everything has been doubled, basically.

AK

Does all of that fall under your purview?

KG

Gaby and I work closely together when it comes down to the general structure of Kunst-Werke Berlin e. V., which is the overarching name of the total organization. We're basically directing and working together, making decisions on those matters when it comes down to usage of the building and the division of tasks. In general, together with the board, we make the bigger decisions.

AK

Are you in charge of the program when it's not the Biennale, and then Gabriele oversees the Biennale logistics?

KG

Yes, those are the shared positions. For example, the main people that deal with the maintenance, people that deal with the technical manager, etc. — for half a year, they only work for the Berlin Biennale. There are three or four positions where our financial director is also shared. So, those people wear two hats. It's correct to say that during the Berlin Biennale, which is including build-up and take-down, the building is theirs for five months. Of course, we try to make it clear to the world that it's hosted by KW, but in principle the building is given to them — the exhibition space — to do whatever they want.

AK

Right. But, for example, this year you had the Lynn Hershman Leeson exhibition off-site, so does KW have the agency to continue to program even when the building is occupied by the Biennale?

KG

Absolutely, because now, as I have said, we've doubled in staff. Our staff is basically under my directorship, and her staff is under hers, and they're all dealing with the Berlin Biennale. In KW's case, we could take a sabbatical; but for me, the "KW on location" is a continuous sort of investigation of what an institution can do beyond what everybody knows. The city's still changing so rapidly. We were in the center of everything and now we're not anymore. Even though we're in Mitte, we're not in the heart anymore of the art institutions or the galleries, because they've been sprouting all over the city.

And it's interesting, especially when you deal with contemporary questions, to tackle those things differently in different places. I'm not only referring to issues of gentrification, but also as a way to test grounds differently in very specific venues. Normally, you'd make an exhibition in a given gallery, right? To make an exhibition you think, "What kind of space would actually be great for this type of work?" There's a lot of site-specificity in terms of the exhibitions one normally does with Biennales. I'm planning to continue doing this every time with the Berlin Biennale, but of course, it takes a long time for people to understand that we're not one thing anymore. We are in a way, but we work for two departments.

AK

I imagine it must be liberating in some ways. Most often we work in institutional contexts where we

have fixed architecture that we have to be content with, and we adapt shows to fit those walls. Instead, once every couple of years, you can actually make the space fit the project.

KG

Exactly. You have the given space, but you always have this urge to create your own environment for exhibitions because you don't want exhibitions to look alike. You want to look at the space with regard to the work and how the work comes out best. Then you're just creating a sort of fictional space within a given space. And if you work on site you have a clear, harsh reality and you can say, "What would a shopping mall do to the work? What would a garage do to the work? What would it be to do a show in a hotel room?" You also build a different tension with the audience. Obviously, you can also lose a lot of your audience too. When you are in a space for 30 years that people know, you have a steady number of visitors — partially tourists and partially regulars.

AK

Exactly. I mean, I'm sure that during the Biennale you must get lots of people, like myself, coming through from all over the world and seeking you out while they're in town.

KG

Yes, but it's very interesting; people that follow us closely of course know what's going on, but people will mostly think, "Okay, KW's having a Berlin Biennale. Great."

AK

Right. So, it will take a while for them to understand.

KG

They'll be surprised, like, "What? There's a program on location?"

AK

Right.

KG

We had an evaluation about it this week because we finished with Lynn Hershman Leeson. It's a way for us to say, "Okay, we didn't invest in a large marketing campaign because we wanted to see how it would play by word-of-mouth and see how that unfolds."

AK

What year did you move to this current building where the Berlin Biennale is now?

KG

In 1991. We were only at the liquor factory for half a year. It was all around the same period.

AK

How does the funding work? Did they increase the funding now that you've divided things up and you have two different staff? Now that you are doing off-site projects, you have to pay to set up a space outside of your current building. How does that work monetarily?

KG

The city of Berlin doubled their financial support and their subsidy in order for us to make this happen. People think that that also means that we have much more money for exhibition-making, but that is a bit of a myth. We had to double the amount of staff costs. So, just by doing that you already lose half of the money, and the other half you can put into your exhibition program. But that means you still have to fundraise two-thirds of the program. You do that in many different ways: private, public, the usual standard things. It's much more comfortable than it used to be, but it's definitely still not an easy ride.

AK

Right. The reason I wanted to focus on the building for a second is to ask if the building went away, and KW relocated elsewhere, would it be the same institution? Do you feel like

it's hinged so intimately to the building since it has been there since 1991 and people really identify it with that site and the Berlin Biennale? Now that you're starting to experiment with off-site programming, is KW something more than a building? Does it have another definable set of conceptual parameters?

KG

That's an interesting question because of course we just did that show with Lynn, which was quite spectacular.

AK

Yes, it was great.

KG

You know, we got emails from people, like, "It's so great to see you leave that place." I received a few invitations to see if KW would be interested in moving, and I'd always say, "No way." So, there are two things: Obviously, the brand KW is stronger than the building, so we will always survive a move. The only thing is, that you would have to start a whole machine again in order to take it out of people's consciousness that we're not on the Auguststrasse anymore.

That said, the building is this sort of ongoing nightmare for us because the whole building is heritage protected, so there's lots of things we can't do with it. That's why, for example, we'll start again in January with a three-year renovation. Not a renovation that I want to do, but it has to do with fire regulations. All of these sort of things that you have to do because, in the end, we're a factory. We're an institution that operates in a factory that's not built for between 60,000 to 100,000 visitors, you know?

You have to constantly adapt the institution to the building. But the building is protected, so it's a constant battle between what we want, what the building requires, and what the city wants. This struggle is interesting, but it's also, of course, exhausting. It's a cliché to say it, but when you are in a place that's been around for quite a while in the same building, there is the magic and the sort of monumental element of that building in regards to the program and its history and the idea of memory. It's extremely strong.

AK

It's huge. I always think about how when the Whitney moved to

their new building or when MoMA was redesigned, they lost all of their ghosts.

KG

I still think that the brand is stronger than the building, but in this case it's, of course, something that literally goes hand-in-hand, you know? If we moved to another location then we would drop significantly in business numbers and have to regain that again. The Whitney went from one building to the other and it just tripled its visitor numbers, right? But that was because it went to another tourist area, a much bigger tourist area, I would say. You can always also use that as an opportunity to restructure and reposition the institution. And, rightfully, what you said, Alex, conceptually, now you're tied to a certain kind of structure. Maybe you're more interested in this, this, and this. Maybe you don't want to only make exhibitions. Maybe you want exhibitions to be even bigger. There are so many things you could consider. Is the function of what the institution does right now relevant for the city? That's the first question I ask myself. What is the urgency of KW at this moment in the city? What does it contribute?

I think it has an enormous amount of significance, an enormous amount of potential to contribute exactly what is missing, which is a space that gives a voice to artists. A space where artists can learn from other artists with such a level of dedication and budget that they also have a certain kind of spunk or attitude, you know? It's like the next step from an artist initiative. Of course, I have a curatorial agenda of how the institution should operate, but for me, it's very important that in this city that was run by artists and is a production city, that there is a space where one gets inspired, where one can see their colleagues, and where younger artists see their tutors or have their voices heard. So, that's what we do instead of having big group shows with lots of complicated subjectivities, which is also, with all respect, fine. But there are other institutions in Berlin that do that, which is great.

AK

It must be incredibly exciting to be working in what's essentially the capital of the contemporary art world globally. But I imagine it also puts other kinds of pressures on an institution by being in a city where there's so much going on.

KG

That's really interesting because actually, institutionally, we're very weak, and that has to do with its history. If you compare the strength of the institutions in Munich or Cologne, for example, our institutions are less defined for many reasons. Therefore, it's good that the city and the country are so open to getting foreigners to direct places because I think that they truly believe that there's a different sort of understanding of how one can direct a place, especially if you don't immediately affiliate with a certain kind of structure, like a hierarchical structure, for example.

I think my colleagues and myself are becoming better and better at defining ourselves. Unfortunately, it's the case that everybody lives and works on an island instead of us all being in it together. We do our own thing, but at the same time I also feel that everybody's voice is necessary. There's not much overlap, not even with the "new" Gropius Bau (now directed by Stephanie Rosenthal) and KW, for example. One could say that maybe we're closer to one another, but I don't have that pressure that that institution has to bring those names. I can still be as experimental because it's a profile of KW. We actually get money to be experimental, you know?

AK

I want to hear more about all of this history behind you stepping in two years ago and your vision for the institution. You were previously in an organization that you had founded, the Kunstverein Amsterdam.

What was it like coming out of that context and then landing in KW that has such a profound history? What were the opportunities and challenges for you coming into it?

KG

I was also the Director of Grazer Kunstverein, in between Amsterdam and KW. To me it's a very personal, almost an emotional thing that I rationalize when I think of Berlin's institutions. I said this to the board when they interviewed me. I said, "I'm just being very honest about how I feel about this institution. For me, it looks like an institution with an enormous amount of potential that has not been fulfilled." As someone who started studying in the late 1990s, I would go to Berlin and I would always visit KW. It would be the first stop on my list. That stopped in 2006–7. I stopped going, you know. I didn't know why.

I just stopped going. I was being very honest about that. I wondered why was I not going anymore. That really had to do with the fact that I just didn't really understand what was going on, you know? For me it was just muddled. I didn't know how to relate to it anymore and, specifically, Berlin was changing so rapidly. All of a sudden, you have to imagine that the institutions, which I told you, were not that strong to begin with, and the gallery system took over.

There's a good quality of galleries. It's the best city in the world for galleries. They basically started running the show with the non-profits and with the artist initiatives. What always annoyed me with Berlin was this eternal shift all the time. Things were initiated and died, initiated and died, initiated... There's constant potential and the only thing that was always there was KW, but it didn't really take up that mantle and lead the way. We are a city for artists and we were fulfilling this cliché by giving voices. I'm not critiquing my predecessor or colleagues. Maybe the urgency of having institutions making real profiles for themselves declined, or maybe I got less interested, I don't know. But specifically, in the moment where now there is a huge clash between history and future, I'm partial to the future.

I come in with a different understanding of where an institution should go. At the same time, I also come with a certain sentiment of what I know is the quality of the city. What makes Berlin interesting is the people. It's not because of the buildings; it's not because of the institutions. It's because of its history, but in the end, it is about people that have defined this space. The public's space—the clubs, the warehouses. How have people used that space? That actually is what made this city what it is.

So, to me it was pretty apparent. Just looking at the building and looking at how we could open up the building and reflecting on its history and thinking about how elements of the history could still be relevant and reintroduced. Give the building back to the artists, and just do shorter shows, from the obscure to the emerging to the established. But we are always wondering, what is the urgency of what this artist does? How do we as an institution want to come across? There is actually a very specific curatorial frame of thinking for how we program. But I don't really like to stuff that down people's throats. For me, the institution is about mediation and an exchange of communication. The institution is about time. It's about losing time. It's about giving a different reality. It's about reflection.

It's all about these sort of basic things, so that's why the program started with the questions, "What is the discussion? How do we relate to each other?" What is it that the space actually can do on that meta-level, you know? Just super basic questions. How were our politics born? When you disagree, what does disagreeing lead to? Which objects, which images are created when you disagree when you talk about politics? Then you look at which artists are interesting to show in Berlin right now. Born in Berlin, never been shown in Berlin, or necessary to be shown because they've been forgotten. Maybe

they're so young that we should be the place to give the first voice to them.

In my introductory speech here at KW I said, "This is a place for failure. It's not only a place for success. This is a place where you can just fall flat on your face and spend 200,000 Euros. It cannot always be about the pressures of life, that you have to make a show that puts you on the map." Sure, possibly that's the case, but it can also just be the case where we trusted and believed in you, and together maybe we failed, you know? Fine, and move on. You cannot always be like that because of a certain legacy where we absolutely did things for artists, we set careers. I can maybe tell you 20–25 names of artists that have really launched their careers because of their show with us. That also applies to you guys; every institution has some of those.

It's very simple in regards to the exhibition program, but it's not so simple in regards to tackling different audiences or different publics, as one would say. And because that actually would lead back to the question of what is an institute, right? Which space is for whom?

The standardized place is where you buy tickets, you see the exhibition. That's one thing. That's one audience. Then, you have a space where you want to work with a much younger audience and a much more experimental sense. That's why we have this bar downstairs. It's a curated space. The person that's invited can completely change the bar according to his or her rules, and then define the evening. So, it's an exhibition where everybody's interested in the ideas of collectivity and social participation. There's all that stuff, but if you have a bar that's in an institution, you can play with those elements. That has its own complete audience, which is also interesting because each night, which is hosted by someone or a group, has its own fans and its own network and its own community. You kind of build a steady community that's interested in all those other communities, but you're also maybe bringing in a community for one night.

I also believe that 50 percent of what we do is production, and so we have many different production lines in our program. Most of the time we produce new work at each show. We also have a production line with Mason Leaver-Yap that's all about moving image productions. We will have a line with Mophradat that only concentrates on new productions from the Arab region. We have a line with Corpus that only concentrates on new productions of performance. All these sort of things, which are really confusing for the audience, but for us, this is like the backbone of the institution. You do many, many, many other things besides exhibitions. The same applies to this project that Tirdad Zolghadr is doing for the next three years, which is all about gentrification and realty, basically. It's called "Realty," but it's all about ideas of property in the end, privatization, and all these questions about the function of the artist within those fields. It's a very cliché set of questions in Berlin, but it's actually more relevant than ever because it's the fastest developing city in Europe, in terms of prices going up every week.

AK

It sounds like for you, KW has a flexibility to it and it can mean many different things, which I think is really exciting and interesting with regard to how we've been thinking about this project. It seems like you're also building in different timelines within your curatorial structure so that there are people who are working on long term projects. There are things that are happening behind the scenes that are public facing that might be just one night, and there are different kinds of focuses. Is it ridiculous for me to even ask you how large your curatorial team is? Is that even definable?

KG

Including myself, it's six people.

AK

Does that include the people who are there for two or three years?

KG

That is kind of unique-ish in the sense that everybody finds the term associate curator strange, but in our case it's literally the right term. So, both Mason Leaver-Yap and Tirdad Zolghadr are two people that acted in conversation. The only thing I told them is do what you do and I pay you for it and you attach yourself to the institution. I'll provide you platforms to do your thing.

AK

Great. So, they're not coming into the office every day, but they have projects that are rotating.

KG

They come up every month for curatorial staff meetings. They have a very clear focus that's built as one assignment, but they both took on more

projects. They both have a three-year contract, so in that case it's also not prolonged. And then the new associate curator comes, someone that I also have a relationship with, and one of us has a close conversation with this person, and we give them a voice and a platform.

This could result in exhibitions, but mostly results in things outside. So, with Tirdad, I spoke to him about the specificity of education, Mason had spoken about production, and in this case about moving image. Mason also runs a moving image performance program in the bar once a month, but I also invited Mason to curate a show at the end of their term. And the same when Tirdad ends his term, he will curate an exhibition.

AK

Then in three years you'll bring  
in a whole new team of people,  
which would keep the institution  
constantly evolving?

KG

The core in-house team doesn't change; Anna Gritz and I curate the program, and that is a stable factor. Then, of course, this doesn't create that much change because, for me, the assistant curator position is also three years and they should move on because it's like education, right? We like to produce people that are able to bring their curatorial voices to the rest of the world and not just stick with us.

Those things are stable, I think. But these associate curators just fuck with our brains. "Is that really necessary? Why would you show that? Not everything has an immediate product... It's like with your project, for example, right? You've been doing this now for what, three years?"

AK

Yes, we started the research  
phase in earnest about three  
years ago. People are very  
product-oriented. They want to  
see things immediately.

KG

That's what I mean. You do significant research and that will result in something that maybe later resonates as a very important document that has meaning. This is what may come down to the word "institute," because there's many layers of how things operate.

## TAUSIF NOOR

What I've been thinking about since you mentioned it is when KW was established the decision was made to operate in English. I'm trying to place, or historicize this desire for internationalism within Berlin's development as a global capital for contemporary art. There are so many people coming in. Do you think that premise still works today? We talk about International Art English, and the discourse around that, but do you think that idea of internationalism based around the English language still holds?

KG

No. I'm only telling you factual things. I would never have done it. If I could have turned it around and called it Kunst-Werke, I would have. It's a decision that was made in the late 1990s, early 2000s. I understand where it comes from.

AK

Getting back to the original name Kunst-Werke, do you know the background of how they came up with that name before they tacked on the "institute" part of it?

KG

Yes. Klaus met people and they had a *verein* called B.E.A.M, and he was in touch with them. There was one woman and three guys and him. So, first it was B.E.A.M, and then they came to the word "kunstwerke"; *werke* is what you say when you go to like an electricity station — a power station. So, that's why it's "kunst" and then this little dash "werke," so it's like a power station or an art power station or something like that because, of course, it was also a factory.

AK

I was going to say, it's tied so intimately to the building — the context and everything.

KG

Yes, and then of course, *kunstwerke* is art works, so like it just plays with a lot of things in German. In Germany you have to establish a *verein* and our *verein* was called Kunst-Werke. But now we have those two departments, so that's why it's so legally confusing for people because we started to use "Kunst-Werke Berlin e. V." in our signatures.

AK

Right, and there's enough of a familiarity that KW will bring something new and interesting that I'm sure there's a contingent of your audience that will come to KW no matter what.

KG

Let's say if you have a Judith Hopf show, you will have more attendees than if you have a Beatriz González show. You just know that, and it became astonishingly easy for me to understand how to program for the city. I refused to do that, so there's a mixed bag. There's a lot of people I talk to who live in Berlin and have a legacy in Berlin in the program, but at the same time we also have a very global conversation. So, in my case, if it's artists learning from artists and artists looking at artists, it's also about which kind of characters and which regions in the world are defined, that have really made a significant contribution to the definition of art and have not been properly represented in the West. For example, amongst others, Beatriz González, or Hassan Sharif, or the Group of Casablanca. There are important moments in those regions where these people stood up and did stuff.

My agenda is to just present significantly important radical positions, whether it's from the West, East, North, or South. I've never defined it by ethnicity or locality or all those things. But, in principle, it should not be the agenda of an institution. When you run smaller institutions like I did before, you can be super obscure and super experimental, which adheres to all its structures, which we did. And then I implement some of those things on top of KW and then you realize that you're talking to a much bigger audience, which is fantastic. Then you have to simplify yourself, while at the same time, holding onto some of the sensibilities that you believe are important.

The bigger you get, the more you get rid of those sensibilities and the more you actually start working towards the fact that you want to be understood by the general audience, but also by your professional audience. So, you have this interesting mixed bag. That's often why you see colleagues kind of flipping towards those decisions. It's a fine line to walk and KW is precisely the perfect institution where you can still be those things.

AK

Because of those varying scales, timelines, and audiences that you have under one umbrella, I'm curious to hear you talk a little bit about who you think of as your peers. These could be both professional relationships, but also on a more historical and conceptual level.

KG

That's a good question. Do you mean colleagues I look towards?

AK

Yes, who you feel you're in dialogue with. Some people think of peer institutions with regard to structure, but sometimes people think of that as an ethos or an agenda. Here at ICA, that operates on a sliding scale. For example, there are much larger institutions we feel we're affiliated with, and smaller ones, and then historical precedents that we want to be in dialogue with, or imaginary futures.

KG

Once, I interviewed for a job and someone said, "Which curators are you inspired by?" And I said, "Well, it sounds cliché, I'm not really inspired by curators, but if I had to make a decision it would be a marriage between Lynne Cooke and Anselm Franke." I would say that's a way of looking at things. It means now that I'm here in Berlin that it's more about respecting a very clear position where I feel that those things can come together. So, in my case, it would be like, Stefan

Kalmár and Anthony Huberman. Of course, we're also all friends and we all have the same tastes. It's not so complicated, right? Of course, KW is always linked to MoMA PS1 because, in principle, we have the same function, but we're not tied to a larger museum. There are several places that I feel affiliated with. When we look at the U.S., there are just very few of them, you guys being one of them. There's just a handful of institutions that I look at: The Renaissance Society, Wattis Institute, Artists Space, maybe once in a while ICA Boston.

AK

I think that was a perfect answer, because it's a hybridized thinking with regard to your peers, and that's also the way you're thinking about your program at KW.

KG

Sometimes we're just too close to one another, right? For example, with Anthony Huberman we're always on the same thing, or Polly Staple, we're always on the same train of thinking, and there's always a certain collaboration.

AK

Now that you're two years in, and you probably just have gotten your ground, what is your vision going forward for the institution? Do you have a timeline for yourself and KW? How dependent is KW on you and your personhood?

KG

I think in order for this program to land and get really respected on a broader scale I think we need at least another five years to just continue a similar type of programming and not get worried that people are bored with it because they're not. For me, it's more about the program as it's implemented now, making it quieter but also bigger in its own way, more established. And in addition of course, I'm on a mission to increase the finances, which is going quite well, and to build a very stable institution that doesn't have to struggle financially every year. That's a goal. I want to have the building all up in order with how I want it to operate.

KW for me has a much larger potential of what it could do in the world. This is a very long process, but I'm already working on it. I'm very interested in what KW could do as a Western institution. There's very few of these institutions left, right? Where basically the politicians agreed that the experiment of the institution with a non-collecting position is of significance to society. It's so fragile these days. You can use the legacy that has been established and take it all over the world and people will know it—you could also use that as a force to change things in specific contexts and to help increase something of significance for a specific region. That could really be through, for example, a series of new productions, where you feel that you can actually contribute something just by the legacy of the name.

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