

From: Susan Cross
Sent: Wednesday, January 31, 2007 5:29 PM
To: Joe Thompson
Subject: thoughts on the Buchel Debacle
Hey Joe,

I hope that Christoph comes back and finishes this show.

But if we are going to open it, here are some things I'm thinking about: Sue and Eric and I all agree that we need to be really careful.

We know Christoph is crazy, but I still think this is a delicate PR issue. I'm not worried about the general public at all— I'm worried about our peers and colleagues and the artists and galleries and press who might work with us in the future.

I don't want in any way to look like we are insensitive to the rights of artists or that we are co-opting an artist's artwork or intellectual property. WE DON'T DO THIS – but I'm just worried how we MIGHT LOOK. (though MASS MoCA makes so much work here, that I think we tend to forget that whether we're doing the welding or not, there is an "author" – an artist for whom we shouldn't make decisions. We need to be careful about what we say about this) The single author/artist idea is such an outdated notion, really. Artmaking is much more collaborative these days – but it is still very muddy. This is one of the "points" we can address if we are going to turn the unfinished exhibition into a didactic "teach the conflict" kind of thing.

I don't think we should even use Christoph's name at all if we open the show – we might just say "an artist from Switzerland" – if we use his name, attach it in some way to the work, I think that is where we might get in trouble.

So, here are some other ideas we can possibly present in our "Unauthorized Biography of an Unfinished Artwork":

1. If Buchel refuses to come back and finish the work, do we have the right to show it? What are the institutions rights? Do we as a collaborator have any rights of ownership since we built it, paid for it. This is really tough. This is where we are. Perhaps the answer is both yes and no (think of Count Panza and the trouble he got into). Though if we don't call it a Buchel, perhaps it is different.

2. As so much contemporary art is on the scale of theater now and it takes so many people to "produce" the work, how does that re-define, if it does, our notions of "artist" (Peter Eleey, Nato's predecessor at Creative Time, for example, has the title of Curator & Producer.)

(actually I just realized we could actually tie this in to our MADE AT MASS MOCA book. Discuss the collaborative process of years back and discuss what it took to make those exhibitions just like so much work has gone into the Buchel so far – tie it into the community of people that worked on it....)

3.. If so many other people actually physically make the work, does the artwork exist really only in the idea, its conception? (Think of Joseph Kosuth – he dates his works – or tries to – with the year of conception only, even if it was actually made years later.) We can talk about it the problem in terms of Conceptual art as well as the problems that have arisen in the wake of Minimalism – where works that exist as plans – a la Judd – and might be fabricated by someone else than the artist, it is not a JUDD unless the artist himself oversaw the fabrication or signed off on it. This is confused even further by artists like Nauman – whose work is often fabricated and re-fabricated at different venues from drawings – a more common practice these days. But still a can of worms.

4. At what point, if at all, does an artist lose his right to owning the idea as his/her "intellectual property" ? if the Buchel exhibition is not finished and thus not art, then if we show it to people as is – is it Buchel's intellectual property – is the unfinished work still "art" or is it just "stuff" - raw materials.... I think it is still art and still belongs to Buchel. (think about Huang Yong Ping and the Bat Project – when the Chinese govt dismantled his airplane and put it in the park – even taken apart, wasn't it still Huang Yong Ping's?)

5. In film and architecture there are precedents for one "artist" taking over the project of another. It is always unpleasant, but still – it is done. Visual and performing arts don't have these precedents.

6. The relationship between artist and institution. The institution usually has so much more power than the artist. But here the tables seem turned. How has the relationship between artist and museum changed over the past few decades?

This whole thing makes my head hurt... I'm still thinking...

7.. I also do like the idea of comparing this situation to the quagmire in Iraq somehow. Though I don't think that we should discuss the original content of the work at ALL. Again those are Christoph's ideas. We should talk about materials...

Sorry, my ideas aren't neat and clean, yet but maybe they'll be of some help or spark some other ideas.

susan