CC: The Akademie der Künste der Welt (Academy of the Arts of the World) envisions itself as a trans-locational organization of artists, researchers and cultural workers rather than an educational institution in the traditional sense. It wants to initiate reflection processes, interventions and collaborations that promote a critical understanding of the arts and rethink the current conditions of cultural production.

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Editorial

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Text: Madhusree Dutta, Artistic Director

The idea of an Academy of the Arts of the World needs to be conceptualized carefully and re-addressed every now and then. Here I wish to share some working notes pertaining to, in general, the current concerns of the art world, and specifically, to an institution that has been entrusted with the mandate to bring the global into the local.

AND

with almost two decades of the new millennium already behind us, we have stepped into the new year amidst melting ice, raging fires, depletion of food resources, shifting of capital, rising majoritarianisms, and an increasing number of biennales. Walls of division across the world are multiplying by the season, and at the same time, the tunnels under these walls are deepening by the night. People are getting hemmed in, people are jutting out, yet some manage to dodge away. There is nothing new in this. We have seen it all … or have we? Is it, rather, a mass imagination, a part of some populist fiction? Perhaps the proportion and scale of the contemporary theatre of politics overwhelm us, challenge our sense of temporality – such that the immediate seems like the distant past, lived-in experience appears fictional, fantasy turns into documentary, original claims to be a copy, and so on.

Has art been pre-empted
by the reality?
OR

is this the most exciting time to be an Academy of the Arts of the World? The world may become more accessible if we learn to negotiate it through the arts. Through the recesses between walls and the porosity of borders, 'the arts of the world' are permeating through, around and across the globe. Locations have turned fluid – people are floating through territories – residuals of the lived-in culture cling to the land even after the flows of people have passed by. Locales are marked by layers of cultural signage scattered and sprawled across like debris. Art might still be locational in its ideological moorings, but no more by its site of production. Posing a challenge to the multi-nationality of capital production and its colonial routes, art has turned trans-locational.

'Arts of the World is possible' (cf. the World
Social Forum) – it is only a
matter of collating it.
YET
'Your memory gets in the way of my memory.'
(Agha Shahid Ali).

Memories and desires are being flagged by more detailed specifications. New cultural identities are surfacing and are being stacked in vertical layers within narrower locations. Artistic expressions too are becoming more dialect-based, nuanced with specificities – opposing colonial anthropology and canonical generalization. The imagination of an internationalism based on ideological solidarities has collapsed with the rise of a market-based projection of globalization and its partner-in-crime, ultra-nationalism. The neo-liberal call for inclusivity is suspected of being a ploy for the expansion of the market economy – whereas newer imaginations of a map of pluriversal, plurinational, planetary dimensions remain distant from realities on the ground. The emerging 'many-s' would require new knitting patterns for intersectional solidarity.

Is a vigorous practice of translation,
of losing some, accessing some and
adding some more,
the only key?
BUT

big data make for a new war zone. Between the state's strategies of surveillance, the market's determination regarding computing and privatizing, and civil society's resolve towards subversion, big data seem to be at the center of all power struggles. It is a crime thriller, adventurous speculation, hegemonic manoeuvre and creative imagination, all rolled into one. The digital temporality of speed, mobility and globality has rendered redundant the analogous mode and the agenda of remembering. Amnesia, which was considered a political conspiracy in the previous world order, seems to be the functional mode in the new democracy of IT industry-enabled social practices. AI dares us to imagine a future without trunkfuls of memory material of uncertain significance. Memory is now the prosumer's goods, customized and with an expiry date. Only those that are processed by industrialized algorithms and preserved in info-banks are considered archival.

What does the situated-ness of
a cultural institution mean
in this context?
ALSO

there are just too many ghosts. The world has turned old with too many whispers crisscrossing the biosphere. The abandoned have turned into ruin spectacles, the absences have maintained a shadowy presence, the erased still contain some legibility, the forgotten continue to haunt, and so on. Ghosts, as is well known, love to change form and play pranks. Ghost Nameless in the anthropological museum escapes and meets Ghost Paperless at the train station; Ghost Archive-deprived chances upon them at a bar; Ghost Lost-nation joins in at the demonstration at the city square … they get inserted in the cityscape. They enter a theatre stage, operate the film projector, change the bedtime story, alter the algorithm, upset the info labels of museum displays, and turn our well-ordered legacy of art upside down.

Artists are ghost-friendly people.
Let us build some cooperation
with the ghosts.

Sometimes only one of the above, at other times some of them, and often all of them together are our brief. In an attempt to navigate these complementary as well as contesting scenarios, we have introduced four themes – *Sites at Stake*, *found: erased:palimpsest*, *Hybrid Transactions*, *Original Fakes* – on which the programme of the Academy is built. In this season, *Hybrid* and *palimpsest* are being addressed.

I take this opportunity to invite you to join us in the adventure of imagining the Academy of the Arts of the World by critically engaging with our endeavours.

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