

Rhyme scene investigation

Hans Ulrich Obrist, named the most influential figure in the art world, calls for more links between poetry and painting

from The Independent, Wednesday, 28 October 2009

Many of the great 20th-century avant-garde movements had one thing in common: close ties between art and poetry. Yet in the 21st century, correspondences between art and music, or between architecture and fashion, are much more commonplace. The Serpentine Gallery Poetry Marathon, which we have recently staged, sought to address this, encouraging a new exchange of ideas between visual artists and poets.

Over the years, I have had many conversations with poets, from Edouard Glissant and Vikram Seth to Christopher Logue. A memorable visit to Nobel Literature Prize winner Czeslaw Milosz with Philippe Parreno revealed that, as a poet, Milosz had a far closer relationship with the visual arts than music.

Milosz's work is structurally more akin to a collage than music. He saw this method of visual assemblage in the work of T S Eliot. Milosz translated Eliot's "The Waste Land" into his mother tongue and also translated the essay "The Painter of Modern Life" by the 19th-century French poet Charles Baudelaire, because of their shared interest in the visual arts.

As a curator, literature helped inform my earliest ideas about producing exhibitions. In the 1980s, I discovered the work of Oulipo, the loose gathering of French writers including novelists Georges Perec and Italo Calvino, poet Oskar Pastior and poet/mathematician Jacques Roubaud. Oulipo functions like a permanent research laboratory for innovation, with the invention of mathematical parameters – rules of the game – to produce experimental literature. The rules, in the words of American author Harry Mathews, create "a certain joy rather than chains". I realised from talking to artists that this concept was vital in the creation of arts exhibitions and artworks as well as literature – we only remember exhibitions that experiment, which invent new rules of the game.

I recently curated my first project exploring dialogues between poetry and art, *Everstill/siempretodavía*, at the house-museum of the Surrealist poet and playwright Federico García Lorca in Granada. Lorca himself believed in the confluence of diverse artists' disciplines. He lived with painter Salvador Dalí, and film-maker Luis Buñuel throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s at the Residences de Estudiantes in Madrid, forming the Surrealist avant-garde movement known as *La Generació*del 27*. In *Everstill/siempretodavía*, great figures of contemporary art, literature, poetry and music came together in homage to the poet for the first time in his hometown. With the participation of visual artists including Gilbert and George, Tacita Dean, Franz West, Cy Twombly, Douglas Gordon and Roni Horn, the project began to build bridges between 21st-century art and poetry.

The Serpentine Gallery Poetry Marathon continued this coming together and pooling of knowledge. It takes up the mantle of *Les Mardistes* and aims to be a salon for the 21st-century, with the involvement of over 50 poets, writers, artists, philosophers, scholars and musicians.

Poetry, as an experimental form of literature, can inspire artists from across different disciplines with the spirit of potentiality, the search for new forms and structures in an attempt to realise something that has not yet been done.

The writer is curator at the Serpentine Gallery and was named Most Influential Figure in the Art World by 'Art Review' magazine

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/rhyme-scene-investigation-1810367.html>