

## BOOK REVIEW:

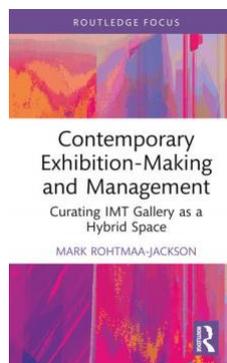
### **'Contemporary Exhibition-Making and Management: Curating IMT Gallery as a Hybrid Space'**

By Mark Rohtmaa-Jackson, 146 pp. (London: Routledge Focus, 2023), £45

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by **Rui G. Cepeda**

The innovative London based IMT art gallery has borrowed its' name from the 1970s book *'Image Music Text'*, a collection of essays by Roland Barthes, and has been led almost as a reflection of the book, as being an open system which weaves into the humanity of everyday life, rather than having a traditional arboreal model feeding from an investments economy.



The book *'Contemporary Exhibition-Making and Management'*, written by Mark Rohtmaa-Jackson, is the most recent title published by Routledge Focus that is dedicated to the global creative economy. This is a thought-provoking book that speaks, in the first person, about the processes used in the managerial and curatorial decision-making behind the fascinating history of IMT. IMT Gallery was founded in 2005, by Rohtmaa-Jackson together with Lindsay Friend, and the author has held the position of curator since that date.

The book is an illustration and evaluation of IMT 'successes' and 'failures'. According to Rohtmaa-Jackson, since its inception IMT has been existing as a hybrid space. For the author, IMT has existed in the confluence of the space occupied by models with characteristics "drawn from both the commercial gallery sector," from those usually "associated with artist-led or garage spaces" (non-for profit structures usually funded through public bodies), and the "characteristics reminiscent of affiliation with academic teaching and research" (p.49). I would like to add, though, to his insightful narrative on IMT' curatorial and managerial practice, the importance of aesthetic discussion and the organisation of projects involving, alongside, the corporate sector and both the local and artistic communities.

*'Contemporary Exhibition-Making and Management'* is a personal narrative, but, also, an account that brings to live a series of dynamic relations through the voice of past curators, artists and that black matter that is an essential component of the artistic

universe. Collaborators who have in different manners generated unique and alternative approaches to arts management and curatorial programming.

During what is almost two decades of existence, IMT has grown up within an emerging governmental cultural policy agenda, at both national and international, that saw the role of the arts and culture as an increasingly determinant in urban regeneration and economic growth. Specially in employment creation and income generation in towns and cities, and, particularly, on those places that were affected by industrial decline. The privatisation of culture, through governmental cultural policies, saw an increase corporate intervention in contemporary art and art institutions governance. However, rather than taking an economic approach, IMT, and an artistic project, decided to head for a more independent and humanistic approach within the existing socio-cultural framework in where they found themselves in.

That governmental 'conservatism approach' towards a more quantifying 'enterprise culture' has been hurting young art galleries and alternative or independent art space and artists the most. Reflecting on his practice, both as an artist, curator, and as researcher, Rohtmaa-Jackson expresses what and reinforces the idea that "contemporary art is a critically engaged field that, for the most part, produces critically engaged actors who are uncomfortable with state power and its various methods of citizen subjection." (p. 53) A situation that, subsequently, has been impacting on arts criticality and the relevance to and in contemporary society of art criticism. Art spaces, the author point out, are now structures and funded to serve the interests of capital and the state. The governmental decisions dealing with the art world norms has been transforming aesthetics experiences through an economy policy regulating cultural goods and services. Maybe this could be a factor behind the falling rate of new art spaces opening. According to a recent global survey conducted by the research and consulting firm, Arts Economics, for the leading art fair, TEFAF, the rate of new art spaces opening dropped by 87% from 2007 to 2017. A decade ago, five art spaces opened to every one that closed; at the moment when this research was conducted (2022), the rate was lower than one to one.

As a curatorial and arts management space, the author and curator shares that, on the one hand, IMT exists at the confluence between being an artist's space, which he conceptually sought, as a curator, to interpret and present the different artistic visions of contemporaneity. While, on the other hand, as being an institutional space, as a physical operation and project with a methodological, collaborative, communicational, commercial, and accumulation of cultural capital focus. A space where the positions (director, curator, artist, public – author) are frequently switched between or transferred to other members of the team or temporary collaborators. As one of the voices brought into the book defended, it is about curating *what IMT is*.

The book proposes a critical-in-depth research and though provoking study exploration about how the act of reinvention and exploration of social concerns and existence through creative processes. Even if those processes and collaborations existing around transience. This personal narrative led by Rohtmaa-Jackson can widen the framework

and create valid alternative models to those existing, particularly, in exhibition-making and management, but, generally, to socio-cultural relationships as a whole.

The author of this new publication on the global creative economy makes us understand that IMT Gallery is a hybrid space that takes a reflective approach towards a structural analysis of contemporary art, in particular, and, both, the applicability and feasibility incorporated by the creative economy, within a broader framework. For Rohtmaa-Jackson IMT is a hybrid space that exists in the process of becoming a gallery, with a rhizomatic base, rather than being a gallery determined by an arboreal model. *'Contemporary Exhibition-Making and Management'*, by Mark Rohtmaa-Jackson, is the most recent book in the series on the Global Creative Economy, and is published by Routledge Focus.



Yak Beow Seah Chong Boon Pok – P & S Recipe Shop



Roy Burns Mask Selfie

BIO:

Rui has been working as a freelance art critic, curator, researcher and arts producer/manager for more than two decades. He has a MA in Cultural Studies from Goldsmiths College, University of London and a degree in Arts and Events Management from London Metropolitan University. His expertise crosses the fields occupied by arts and cultural management and production, the market for and

contemporary art theory, as well as social criticism and participation, and epicure. He is the founder of the cross-cultures festival Trienal, a festival that brings together all those interests.