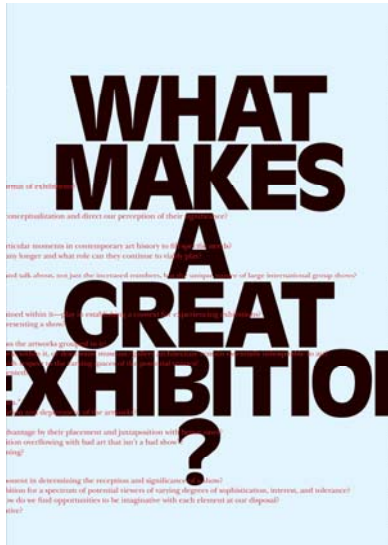


What Makes a Great Exhibition? / Edited by Paula Marincola.--Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, dist. by Reaktion Books and The University of Chicago Press, March 2007.--176 p. ill.--ISBN-13: 978-0-9708346-1-4: \$16.95 (pa.).



In this era of blockbuster shows, with museums and galleries vying for public attendance, the question of putting together a skillfully curated exhibition becomes paramount. On the heels of a successful symposium, "Curating Now," sponsored by the Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, editor Paula Marincola, determined that a gathering of essays on the questions and practice of putting together a successful exhibition would be a viable asset in the burgeoning literature of museum studies. Although many of the authors of the essays, interviews, and letters are curators who work in the field of contemporary art or design, the sound principles of a great exhibition can parlay into most disciplines or eras.

All the authors who contributed their thoughts, suggestions, and even philosophical musings are seasoned curators or exhibition makers, yet they speak from different perspectives and experience. The authors, from both sides of the Atlantic, are faced with similar concerns and challenges. Interest ranges from those that deal with the physical space of the museum itself, such as those addressed in "Mies's New National Gallery: Empty and Full," by Detlef Mertins to the specificity of successful didactic labels addressed in "Wall Text" by

Ingrid Schaffner. To stimulate discussion in categories expressed as "The Essentials," "Localities," "Framework," "The Arrangement," and "But Not Least," Marincola supplied each author with a list of questions. The questions following each category fleshed out the complexities of the categories and, depending on the author's stance, each was used as a starting point.

Robert Storr's "Show and Tell" essay challenges curators or exhibition-makers on finding exciting premises for exhibitions that will provoke both the organizer and the viewer to look at art with fresh interest. Paola Antonelli, in an interview conducted by Bennett Simpson, articulates the challenges of putting together a design and /or architecture exhibition. Complementing this essay is Jeffrey Kipnis's musings on the difficulty of exhibiting architecture and design shows. Carlos Basualdo in "The Unstable Institution," presents the difficulties of staging international exhibitions. In "Handy-Crafts: A Doctrine," Glenn Adamson deals with the much debated notion of craft as art and the exhibitions that the objects inspire. In "With Our Faces to the Rising Sun" Thelma Golden and Glenn Ligon discuss the challenges, with varying degrees of success, of organizing ethnic or cultural exhibitions and the responsibilities to the ethnic or cultural group. These are but a few examples of thought-provoking essays that should spark lively debate on all sides of the table for both the stewards and the viewers of art.

This collection is highly recommended not only for museum libraries, but also academic libraries, especially those who support museum studies programs and fine arts and art history disciplines. Within each category you will find those who will be on one or the other side of a future great exhibition.

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