



Fig. 5. Bertrand Lavier. Empress of India II. 2005. The collection of the Louis Vuitton Foundation, Paris. <https://www.fondationlouisvuitton.fr/en/the-collection.html>

Lavier appropriated and transformed Frank Stella's work "Empress of India" (1965, minimalist "Notched-V" series) into a neon edition. Lavier did nothing but change colours and materials. The bright light gives a surprisingly soothing and relaxing feeling, while the warmth radiated by neon tubes changes the viewer's experience of the space. Stella's concept of counterbalanced dynamic and powerful vectors is re-embodied with the addition of a spatial component. The room in the gallery became, not only the arbitrary walls and ceiling and the props for the artwork, but an active participant in the creation of an overall impression. Tinted with purplish colour, the white planes of the gallery space and the skin surface of visitors extended the artwork, which, on the one hand, increased the involvement of a viewer, enveloping them into the cradle of light, and on the other hand lowered the acuteness and sharpness of straight tubes arranged in a chevron-like pattern. A polite appropriator, Lavier re-created a glamorous and cheerful product, an enigmatic street sign from a sci-fi movie set or disco bar interior. This art supports itself without struggle or hardship or the engagement of harsh emotions. Neither drama, nor violence, nor emotional dictatorship is inherent to this art. Once you have got used to the brightness of lamps, you relax in a familiar, cozy state and aristocratic calmness in face of neon lights.

The last (but not the least) piece in the exhibition — interesting, beautiful, pleasant and not at all boring — was Isa Genzken's "Bouquet" (2004) (Fig. 6). It is simple and complex — a combination of silver lemons and fake flowers over a shelf of toy soldiers and dinosaurs, set on the long pedestal muffled with silver garland. The piece has the overall fluffy, thick texture, full of playful glistening overtones and shades, hidden under long rectangular silver garland clusters weaving between arranged figures. Humble and cheap materials give the assemblage an effortless look. Tints of light-greens intertwined with pinkish paints produce the memory of nursery fairy tales in which only these moonlight-silvery colours could make mysterious things incarnate. It is incredibly pleasant to observe and follow the development of changes in Genzken's work. The artist has revealed, through the use of everyday objects, the attractiveness of synthetic beauty that is understandable and familiar to any visitor of the gallery.

These works vividly illustrate the transition of the expressionist mode in art since 1950s. This important ingredient of visual arts of the 20th century is a highlight of the Moscow Louis Vuitton exhibition. It offers the public a closer understanding of art without institutional demands to read extensive scholarly texts and visit lecture halls. The pieces showed the



Fig. 6. Isa Genzken. Bouquet. 2004. The collection of the Louis Vuitton Foundation, Paris. <https://www.fondationlouisvuitton.fr/en/the-collection.html>

visitors that contemporary art is not always about aesthetic challenges and intellectual confusion. It can also be about something simple, balanced, less dramatic, everyday, and still no less important than institutional and intellectual mind ripping emotions and concepts.

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ИНТЕРВЬЮ С РОКСАНОЙ МАРКОЧ — СТАРШИМ КУРАТОРОМ ОТДЕЛА ФОТОГРАФИИ МУЗЕЯ СОВРЕМЕННОГО ИСКУССТВА В НЬЮ-ЙОРКЕ

INTERVIEW WITH ROXANA MARCOCI — SENIOR CURATOR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PHOTOGRAPHY AT MOMA

Less than a hundred years ago, the Museum of Modern Art opened in New York City, ushering in a period of disciplinary specificity that has now been reimagined as transdisciplinary and transnational. Rebuilt and renovated in 2004 by architect Yoshio Taniguchi, the museum has, in 2019, been reconceived, enabling new paths, new narratives, and new notions of progress to cut through those that were codified in the twentieth century. Twenty years after Roxana Marcoci joined MoMA's staff as the Janice H. Levin Fellow/Curatorial Assistant in the painting and sculpture department, the museum has caught up to her rigorous way of making connections between ideas and practices that honors distinctions while acknowledging relationships.

Roxana Marcoci left her native Romania after high school, arriving in Paris as a political refugee and studying linguistics and art history at the Sorbonne. She continued her studies two and a half years later in the United States, at Hunter College, part of the City University of New York. There, she triple majored in art history, theater and film criticism, and a colloquium in interdisciplinary studies taught by professors from two different humanities' fields. Marcoci received a Ph.D. in art history, theory, and criticism from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, in 1998, where she studied with Kirk Varnedoe, Robert Rosenblum and Gert Schiff whose broad perspectives on intellectual history provided a ready context for her own. She wrote her dissertation on issues pertaining to Constantin Brancusi and in 1999 began work at MoMA. In 2003, Marcoci was promoted to Assistant Curator in the photography department. She became Curator in that department in 2007, and Senior Curator of Photography in 2013.

From the beginning of her tenure in photography, she worked in a transdisciplinary mode, including a retrospective of Thomas Demand, whose work contends with a line between photography and sculpture, and an exhibition called "Comic Abstraction: Image-Breaking, Image-Making", which dealt with humor in abstraction and included all mediums except for photography. She is a critic at Yale University's graduate school in the photography department, and has continued to excavate the future of photography by investigating currents in the medium underemphasized in the 20th century. With exhibitions like "The Shaping of New Visions: Photography, Film, Photobook" (2012), "The Original Copy: Photography of Sculpture, 1839 to Today" (2010), and "Staging Action: Performance in Photography Since 1960" (2011), Marcoci teases out photography's productive relationships with other mediums, a practice she also does by focusing on individual artists, such as "Louise Lawler: WHY PICTURES NOW" (2017), "Zoe Leonard: Analogue" (2015), "Christopher Williams: The Production Line of Happiness" (2014), "Taryn Simon: A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I-XVIII" (2012), and "Sanja Iveković: Sweet Violence" (2011).

As Chair of the Central and Eastern European group of MoMA's C-MAP (Contemporary and Modern Art Perspectives in a Global World), she has led participation in the global research initiative, which connects art histories in Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean to those that have dominated Western thought for so long. Through publishing, conversation, education, and curatorial work, then, Marcoci has steadily worked to ensure that contemporary art not remain cloaked in the fallacy of homogeneity and linearity, but rather find stimulus in the complexity of its past.

California-based artist, Farrah Karapetian, spoke with Marcoci about this work, with a special interest in its implications for photography's role in transboundary contexts.

Farah Karapetian: Can you tell me about how the new MoMA is organized differently than it was before? How does its new organization reflect your interests in transdisciplinary, transnational narratives?

Roxana Marcoci: Art is grounded in asking questions, and that's what I do as a curator. Over the past decade, I have been collaborating with colleagues across curatorial departments to rethink MoMA's engagement with diversity, intermodality, and a non-exclusively Western-centric history. The new MoMA, which just opened its doors to the public after a period of three months of reinstallation of its permanent collections, is premised on the idea that what we

show in the museum's galleries is an articulation of who we imagine our audiences to be. Our public is international, cross-generational, and visually and intellectually savvy. The collection is now fully integrated for the first time, meaning all mediums — painting and sculpture, film, photography, drawings, performance, architecture and design — are presented together along a loose chronological line. Every six months a third of the collection installations on view across its distinct floors will conceptually change — the collection will be in constant motion. This way, we are establishing a display model based on the idea of "work in progress" rather than the representation of outcomes, generating productive links between new transnational narratives.

FK: How is this different from the MoMA you joined in 1999 in painting and sculpture and/or, later, the photo department? Elsewhere you have referred to that earlier period as a «federation with different countries» for each medium. Not every country's institutionalization of art divides it as medium-specifically as did modernist New York institutions. Can you consider how the divisions impacted not only the growth of the collections or who might have put together shows, but also notions of the mediums themselves?

RM: When I joined MoMA, the collection galleries were medium-specific. Each curatorial department was exclusively in charge of its own galleries, not unlike a federation. There was the Edward Steichen photography gallery on the third floor where we would present an abbreviated history of photography. On the fourth and fifth floors of the museum, you could go to see the painting and sculpture collection presented by movements. The history of modernism was at once incomplete, and rigid (the "isms"), presented in ways detached from the complexity of real life. Do artists live in a world of just camera-based paradigms? Or just paintings? Or just architecture? Do they live in a vacuum without ever exchanging ideas with other artists, musicians, performers, filmmakers, etc.? This principle didn't make much sense to me, but it was a way of organizing knowledge. Now, when you visit the museum, these strict delineations are dissolved. The integrated collections allow us to reimagine the story of modern and contemporary art in more inclusive and differential ways, to present the contributions of women and artists of color, to focus on the specificities of context as well as worldwide narratives and collaborations, and to benefit from dialogical curatorial methodologies.

FK: This writing follows up on my experiences in Russia, most immediately on a conference in Moscow that posed the question of photography's role in the arts. In the U.S., we still have conferences and books and shows positioned around the question of what "is" photography, although I believe that at least as of the last couple of years, that question has relaxed and the question in the States is more frequently "who" is pictured, "who" is photographing, "who" is engaged. "Is it an art" at all is a question less frequently asked in the U.S. since the integration of photography into higher arts education programs and fine art museums in the mid-20th century. What do you think are the questions being asked in the US right now? What are the questions being asked in Central and Eastern Europe?

RM: Photography is a medium that at any given point is at a transformative phase. The transformation in question has to do with the apparatus of technologies, institutions, and artistic practices to which photography belongs. I think that we all agree that since its advent, in 1839, the photographic medium not only modified our habits of perception, but offered a model of dissemination that revolutionized all aspects of culture. In recent years, with the increasing turn from analog to digital, photography's potential for reconstructing, archiving and engaging with meaning in the world today has become more textured and manifold in its range of representational renderings. Expanding the processes of making pictures into a series of artistic operations, none of which can be reduced to a unified medium, contemporary artists recognize it to be a porous medium with fluid borders. So, I am sure that the questions that are being raised here and there are as diverse as you can imagine them to be. The issue of "who" is photographing, or takes control of the visual narratives, or even has the right to representation, is critical. In the Forums on Contemporary Photography that I founded at MoMA back in 2013, we have discussed topics that range anywhere from "Photographic Representations and Colonial Discourses" to "What Makes Contemporary Photography Feminist and Queer?".

FK: It was at the moment after World War II — when Stalinist strictures around what could be produced and disseminated

photographically defined the medium's category as a-artistic in the Soviet Union. There were so many ways in which artists who worked photographically continued to do so, though, either by working within the graphic arts, working unofficially and exhibiting in apartments, or even by simply using photography to document ephemeral, performative, and conceptual practices, in a way perhaps parallel to the way in which Jeff Wall argues photography developed a sense of self-reflexivity that led to its entry into fine art practices in 20th-century Western art history. What are a couple of examples of mid to late 20th-century photographic works from Central and Eastern Europe that can suggest that photography continued to be practiced there as art even when it was not categorized thus there?

RM: There are numerous examples from the 1960s and 1970s to be offered, especially within what came to be known as "global conceptualism". Artists from Central and Eastern Europe were tuned to the attendant social unrest in their countries and around the world, using photography as a tool to examine and demonstrate the relationship between images and power. The discord was marked by student uprisings, many of them in the universities of socialist Eastern Europe (especially Yugoslavia), where artists such as Tomislav Gotovac, Mladen Stilinović, and Braco Dimitrijević broke free from mainstream institutional settings and expanded the notion of art into public space and political reality.

At the forefront of this generation was Sanja Iveković, whose conceptual works brought a critical eye to the representation of women in Yugoslavia and opposed conformist culture. To give you an example, on May 10, 1979, in an act of political defiance, Iveković performed Triangle on the balcony of her apartment during Josip Broz Tito's official visit to Zagreb. As the presidential motorcade advanced, the artist pretended to masturbate while at the same time reading Tom Bottomore's Elites and Society, a 1964 Marxist study about power relationships in modern society. Iveković's actions could not be seen from the street, but a secret police agent was watching her from a hotel across the street: the titular triangle was completed when, eighteen minutes into the performance, the police rang the artist's doorbell and commanded her to stop her activities. Presented as four photographs with a short text, Triangle is a resonant and defiant manifestation of the tenuous relationships between public and private space, gender and power.

The rapport between the individual and the conforming forces that shape social reality was also central to the work of Jiří Kovanda, a pioneer of Conceptual art whose career began in the radicalized climate of Prague after the 1968 Soviet reoccupation of Czechoslovakia, a period of forced «normalization» of the country by the Soviet military. Against a backdrop of political repression, Kovanda found meaning in simple actions recorded by the camera. In the streets of a city under constant surveillance, he enacted barely perceptible yet politically disruptive gestures (such as Contact, 1979) that were illegal under Soviet rule. I could go on and on....

FK: More recently, I have seen the influence of, say, the New Topographics photographers on artists like Sergey Sapozhnikov, which is interesting, because Russian higher education does not generally include "History of Photography" courses or even courses in photography within fine art departments. It is still categorized as journalism. The Rodchenko School in Moscow does offer photography as an option for its students, to fascinating ends, such as with the work of Polina Kanis, but of course, education in Russia is different from that in the States. Students work with a master for the duration of their experience, and may or may not work specifically on or in a medium, as especially East Coast schools do here in the States. There is no reason why Russian schools should model themselves after Western programs, or vice versa, and in fact a relay between the two systems would be interesting. From your perspective as an educator, what might be a way to increase awareness of 20th-century photographic practices into the global stream

¹ For a list of the questions raised in these forums, please see: <https://www.moma.org/calendar/programs/83>

of which young artists in Central and Eastern Europe are now being thrust?

RM: I recall that when I was in graduate school there were no courses on critical theory, but that didn't stop me to read books on the topic — at the time, anything from Russian Formalism to French post-Structuralism. I think that today is not difficult to keep in touch with different theoretical and artistic debates since so much is being disseminated online, chatroom seminars, educational platforms in museums and other non-for-profit spaces. I always give my Yale students a huge bibliographical list covering the arch of time-and lens-based art histories. Young artists are curious about the full spectrum of ideas and methodologies. They themselves tap on different sources and work with a compendium of source images — whether shot in the real world, grabbed from the screen, digitally manipulated and edited, constructed in the studio, or culled from pop culture, advertising, or the movie industry — constantly shifting contexts, from the magazine page to the gallery wall, and from the projection screen to digital social platforms. This expanded discursive field is fueled by all sectors of inquiry. As an educator it is important to sharpen students' apperception and sense of criticality of what it means to work photographically in the age of the image.

FK: **There is a lot of talk in the art world in the States about its decolonization. While this can be understood on one basic level as simply repopulating institutions with new names from broader backgrounds, or, for some activists, investigating funding sources, etc., I like to think of the work you're doing — actually excavating the narratives around women and Eastern European artists, say — as a deeper kind of decolonization. If we all think of landscape photography as having, say, Atget, Steichen, Weston, the Bechers, Stephen Shore, and Lee Friedlander, as like the default lineage, and we don't understand that there are completely different ways of looking at history, it doesn't matter whose work you insert into the lineage; it's still colonized. What is your take on the contemporary decolonization of institutions? What do you really see as the deepest most constructive example of that having happened?**

RM: Yes, I could not agree more. I resist the idea of tokenism associated with the “parachute” curator, who lands in a culture, makes a few acquisitions, and then inserts those objects into old canonical narratives. That's why C-MAP is instrumental to us, providing a long-term dialogical research forum. The public panel we had this year in the context of C-MAP, titled *The Multiplication of Perspectives*, precisely offered a variety of lenses through which to consider other lineages than those prescribed, as well as the idea of entanglement, and focused on some of the promises and pitfalls of a global approach to art and its histories. A series of dialogues, forums, keynote presentations, and screenings were organized to juxtapose particular histories and practices within a common framework, as participants contributed nuance about the multiplicity of modernities and histories of contemporary art, about the untranslatable, and about the migration of images and knowledge across cultures and temporalities.

FK: **One of the things I've been most impressed by in my experience of visiting Russia — as an artist exhibiting at Garage, at the conferences I've attended, etc. — is the totally different kind of diversity of artists and art historical narratives I find myself a part of. In California, we have had wonderful work showing the way that contemporary art in the States includes and is deeply informed by African American and Latin American narratives, but less so with respect to the kinds of socio-geographical routes that I see revealed in Russia. Is it important that we look beyond the routes we are used to? What if the routes that curators are working so hard to reveal here are the ones most relevant to California's population? What, for example, about the history of resistance to particular kinds of political**

regimes in Central and Eastern Europe could be useful to contemporary U.S. audiences, even if they don't know about it yet?

RM: Well, if you are referring to the academic sphere, you can devise a course along any lines you choose to define. The same is true if you write a book or an article. When you work in a museum, you often depend on the history of the institution and its collection. Some museums are truly encyclopedic such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, others are grounded on more focused histories. If you come to see the integrated collection installation at MoMA, you will find various foci — some in reference to the history of resistance to particular political regimes in Latin America, others in response to a single event such as the Tiananmen Square protests in China, and still others in relevance to the history of identity, migration, and race politics in America. The routes that we take are part of a larger network of ideas, of detours and intersections that complicate the linear path of any single master narrative.

FK: **I have noticed women's voices organically becoming more a part of photography exhibitions since your tenure at MoMA. The way women are depicted in Soviet films is very different from the way women are depicted today in films coming out of Russia. The depiction of women in American films is also something we work on. The way men are depicted in photographs has remained the same throughout all time in every culture: active agents of their own representation, they are never reclining, never passive, never desired, unless utterly fetishized for one reason or another — usually by a homosexual male gaze. I see lesbian work on the objects of their desire, but rarely heterosexual female work on similar such objects. Where do you see a straight female gaze most evident in photography, anywhere in the world?**

RM: I see it everywhere, truly. I think the #MeToo movement has had a lasting impact on female agency and increased awareness across cultural and socio-political fields. Again, I am going to make reference to a specific case — an installation currently on view at MoMA because I like to think that the straight female gaze is more pervasive than we think. The section titled *Transfigurations* on the 2nd floor contemporary galleries brings together a group of female artists across nations and generations — i.e. Jo Baer, Geta Brătescu, Marlene Dumas, Zofia Kulik, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Cady Noland, Lorraine O'Grady, and Cecilia Vicuña — who have reimagined how women are represented. Together, they explore how the female form, through both defiant and poetic means, inhabits the world. I am not going to go into each of these artists' works, but take, for instance, Kulik's 1997 self-portrait, *The Splendor on Myself*, which alludes to Tudor-era images of Queen Elizabeth depicting the British monarch in Spanish-inspired gowns and surrounded by symbols of her reign. Instead of appropriating the Queen's royal attributes, Kulik composed this work from her vast archive of images using a photomontage technique. Facing the viewer directly, she wears an elaborate dress constructed from scores of small-scale nude male figures. By weaving these bodies into her gown's material, the artist has emphasized a specifically decolonized female authority and personal agency that challenges male-centered systems. I feel this mode of address has always been with us. What we need to do more actively is to bring to the forefront the histories of women artists, patrons and collectors of art and architecture, dealers, art historians and critics, curators, conservators, and guardians of culture.

In the 21st century, as institutions pursue new ways of organizing an understanding of art's role in societies, its multifaceted histories, and options for its radical futures, Marcoci's work can serve as a model of the opportunities afforded by transboundary strategies.