

© The Tentative Collective, taken during the project **BEYOND WALLS**

COLLECTIVITY AFTER THE DIGITAL TURN

CONTEMPORARY ARTIST COLLECTIVES IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN: RAQS MEDIA COLLECTIVE, CAMP AND THE TENTATIVE COLLECTIVE

Rebecca John

Artist collectives and other forms of collaborative work - unions, workshops, circles, groups, partnerships or teamwork - are by no means new in art practices around the world. Yet artists' contemporary practices display a renewed interest in these working methods. In my Master's thesis, I concentrated on the phenomenon of artists working together on a long-term basis, under one collective name, in forms that they call collectives or studios.

I started with the observation that most recent art historical writing on collectivity identified a new period of collectivism but ignored connections to specific local contexts. I aimed at closing this gap by bringing artists' local situatedness to the fore. On the basis of a series of interviews conducted in India and Berlin, I analysed the positionality of three contemporary artist collectives founded in Delhi, Mumbai and Karachi: Raqs Media Collective, CAMP and The Tentative Collective. Furthermore, I abandoned eurocentric categories such as "after Modernism" and instead described collectivity in the contemporary period by using the digital turn as a way to understand the beginning of a new moment in global art.

What unfolded through my discourse analysis of the interviews was an understanding of contemporary collectivity from the perspective of the artists. They define their practices as being locally situated and simultaneously globally connected. They work with old and new media, build digital archives, navigate in networks, move between disciplines, leave the traditional studio, interact with larger communities, engage in artistic research and try to disrupt the idea of a single author and original artwork. The collectives' embeddedness in contemporary art jargon became evident in their accounts of locality in a globalised art world, and their interests in commons, networks, archives, interdisciplinarity, and interfaces, as well as in their use of existing theories and terms. For instance, CAMP cites Armen Avanessian's "post-contemporary",

Lawrence Liang's "grey of copyright" and Ravi Sundaram's "pirate modernity", while Raqs uses Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's concept of "multitude".

My thesis explores new modes of investigation which draw attention to contemporary artists who challenge eurocentric categories of art history. It also shows the multiplicity of terms and concepts used by the collectives themselves when discussing collectivity. Further research on contemporary collectives in South Asia could include other collective formations, such as CASP, Layout, BIND, Surfatial, WALA, Shunya/ Clark House Initiative, Maraa, Forager Collective, Famous Artist Collective, Desire Machine Collective, SAHMAT, VASL, Awami Collective, as well as Open Circle and Samuha, whom I would all like to thank for their tremendous openness and input.



RAQS MEDIA COLLECTIVE in their studio © Srinivas Kuruganti

About the Author:

Rebecca John completed her MA in Art History and Visual Studies at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (2018). She took several courses at IAAW. After two semesters at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, she curated the exhibition *Common Ground. Where the Circles Intersect* at Kleine Humboldt Galerie, Berlin (2017).



© Rebecca John