



Tuesday, 4 October 2011, 9:00 am.

Keynote Session: Place

Speakers

Jacques Martial, President, Parc de la Villette, Paris, France

Eduard Miralles, Cultural Relations Advisor, Barcelona Provincial Council, Spain

Moderator

Robyn Archer, AO, CdOAL (France), OC (Belgium)

Rapporteur

Tony Grybowski, Executive Director, Arts Organisations, Australia Council for the Arts

Description of the session

This session focused on the role of culture in the urban environment and social change and how cultural action and policies should allow for cultural inclusion of all the “colours of the rainbow”.

Jacques Martial discussed the links between culture and place. He described the plan he pitched and is now carrying out that has resulted in the redevelopment of a cultural space into what is now one of the best-funded cultural institutions in France, *Parc de la Villette*. A large urban park of 55 hectares in the 19th arrondissement in Paris, Parc de Villette was formerly an abattoir, cattle and meat market that operated between 1867 and 1974. The site was redeveloped as a park and now has a mission to ‘*animate and exploit the urban cultural ensemble known as the Park and the Great Hall of the Villette... Develop arts, Cultural and Education activities*’.

Jacques’ initial observation was that while some of the artists presenting work within the park’s programs were from different cultures, the audience was largely white. He spoke of the ‘*colours of the rainbow*’ who originally attended the park being reduced to ‘*one colour*’.

In his role as President, he tried to exhibit art from cultures he was targeting as audience (e.g. West Indian) but found that neither his audience (West Indians) nor his traditional (white) art audience

attended resulting in only 32,000 attendees against a target of 100,000. Over time this has significantly improved and he has created a vibrant cultural centre by involving the local communities and inviting them to participate. In addition he was able to ensure that all exhibitions are now free.

Eduard Miralles spoke about how local governments can ensure that their cultural policies allow for the kind of radical cultural inclusion of long-term resident minorities and recent arrivals as described by Jacques Martial. He posed the question how can policy balance the conflicting emotions of artists and residents in the increasingly diverse mix of populations in our big cities and neighbourhood. Furthermore, he outlined his views about what other cultural priorities for local governments should be in the 21st century.

Eduard gave three poignant examples of individuals who had managed to change their local culture through using art, humour and culture to engage people and to break down pre-conceptions and stereotypes. The most memorable was Antanas Mockus, former mayor of Bogota. Antanas is the son of Lithuanian immigrants to Colombia. He set about changing the culture in one of South America's most dangerous cities, including using several techniques such as employing clowns as traffic cops.

Eduard emphasized that for any cultural change to be effective several systems need to operate simultaneously including law, morals and importantly culture. Culture is not an ornament. It is a resource or catalyst for cohesion and development.

Creative intersections discussed in the session

The focus of both speakers was the intersection between people, places and the projects they used to bring these elements together. They touched upon elements such as culture and citizenship, security, social cohesion, integration, local governance, fight against racism and discrimination, and co-living of inhabitants in an urban environment.

Examples of good examples and practices

Both presentations explored local cultural action as a practice of cultural change.

Identified problems and obstacles

- Barriers for welcoming 'all colours of the rainbow', including new cultures.

Recommendations for future actions in the field

- Allowing more such specific projects to flourish, with appropriate support and funding.