

Contemporary art is already provincial

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CONTEMPORARY ART IS ALREADY PROVINCIAL

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Lucy Macintosh I very much enjoy passing by all the neighbourhoods that form Switzerland. It is as if you live in a big city of about eight million people, where different communities talk their different languages and share their ideas, attractions, inspiring situations and problems with just roughly two hours by train separating them. This "big city" is beautiful, sometimes too beautiful. How does someone from the "provinces", such as Valais, decide to get swallowed up by the big network of contemporary art today? Well, it is not very complicated and quite thrilling. This Valais artist is conscious and ambitious that their art may be produced, displayed and supported by galleries and institutions. Thus, the best thing that happened to them was to be born or to live here, where so many possibilities and backing exists for contemporary art. In my own experience, living in the Italian and French part of Switzerland, I always encountered artists and curators who are moving backwards and forwards, enjoying the privilege of living in the belly button of Europe. We are all "provincials" in relation to geography: it is a question of point of view and not whether we live in Berlin, Shanghai, or Lausanne.

I opened a long art space in 2004 and decided to invite all the best people to create shows for the space. I never go without a night's sleep just because I work in a remote area. When I work with Swiss artists, mother tongue or place of origin are unimportant. It is fun and sometimes intriguing to observe their attitude as they are often much more cosmopolitan than other Europeans: always obsessively "in" and worried when they do not know something they think they should know – they are impressively learned people.

Contemporary art is an international yet closed world, just like Switzerland, where obsessions, neurotic ideas and playful intuitions can be shared. The public here, with the huge cultural offer, is everything but provincial. We are perhaps suffering from a lack of scarcity by being overstimulated and overfed with culture... although who wants to complain?

And now, what does it mean to be from the "provinces"? Is it to be away of the centre? Away from the ideas? Away from the money? Away from the avant-garde? Away from where things happen? These problems occur everywhere, so we will always be away from something. What is most important for me is to feel what is happening in contemporary art today, how it may be diagnosed and how to try to be sensitive to it by making a good, digested, show in the gallery. Hence, someone from anywhere in the world, can visit it through the Internet, be seduced by it and become knowledgeable with it. It's not bad at all to be able to experience this and to have a strong feeling of ignorance about the impact that these artists will have in the whole soup of contemporary art. It promotes creativity.

As long as we are all concerned with developing our "neighbourhood" as a good place to live in and by being proud of the "big Swiss city" that echoes all around, all will come right.