

NETWORKED:

Dialogue & Exchange in the Global Art Ecology
Triangle Network Conference
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FAX:

A form of international network building text by Nova Benway



Independent Curators International (ICI) takes up the Triangle conference's discussion of networks via a long history of initiating projects that investigate the very nature of this term in contemporary culture. The question of how to define a network, raised in a previous Dispatch on this blog, can perhaps be clarified through consideration of projects that confront the most elemental aspects of exhibition-making: the work itself, and the roles of the artist and curator. Here, we will be posting periodic thoughts on ICI's activities within networks of various kinds, incorporating input from practitioners with whom we have collaborated recently.

We begin with FAX, an evolving exhibition that began in New York in 2009, and continues to be reconfigured, expanded, and localized as it is presented—often simultaneously—in venues worldwide. FAX invites artists, architects, designers, scientists, and filmmakers to think of the fax machine as a drawing tool, resulting in an exhibition concerned with ideas of reproduction, obsolescence, distribution, and mediation.

The first iteration of the exhibition, held at The Drawing Center in New York, featured a core of works by nearly 100 artists, including seminal examples of early telecommunications art. With every new incarnation, the hosting institutions are encouraged to invite additional artists to submit works, which are then permanently added to the show. New participants submit faxes throughout the duration of the presentation using a specially designed cover sheet by Dexter Sinister. Visitors view the collection of faxes on the walls or flip through archival binders to see over 500 pages of works.

This summer, ICI was in residence at the South London Gallery (SLG), which created the opportunity to launch a forum for reflection on what 'international' means in relation to curatorial practice today. As part of this research three curators from ICI's network were invited to collaborate on developing FAX further, inviting new artists, thinkers, designers from their locale to participate. The curators invited were David Ayala Alfonso who is based in Bogota, Columbia, where he works as the curator for Project For Empty Space: Bogota, and as Chief Editor for *emergencia* magazine, as well as being a collaborator with the Group 0,29; Oyinda Fakeye, who is an independent curator and the co-director/founder of The Video Art Network (VAN) in Lagos, Nigeria, and Zane Onckule, who is an independent curator and writer, as well as the director of KIM? Contemporary Art Centre in Riga, Latvia. Together they invited nearly thirty people to participate and the results of this are now on show in London, providing nearly all the artists with their first exposure in that city.

FAX, then, could be viewed as a modestly scaled, yet potentially infinitely far-reaching, traveling communication hub. The accessibility of the medium of transmission, as well as the constraints it imposes on participating artists, raises the question of context: can we think of such a project as existing outside of regional contexts – a vital aspect of our discussion of international networks? Likewise, faxed artworks have a relationship to internet-based work, which often depends on a shifted relationship to the audiences who encounter it. But would we include a project like FAX, a fascinatingly 'crude' form of one-way communication, in this category? Finally, FAX's reproducibility as an exhibition, and the ease with which it incorporates new elements, prompts the inquiry: is accumulation – or multiplication - a form of network building? What kind of power do repetition and addition hold in the global culture of contemporary exhibition making?