



**Arts
Collaboratory**

**REPORTS |
on the Arts Collaboratory
Assembly Senegal 2015**

**Arts Collaboratory Assembly
to Fill the Gaps in an Alternative
Art Context**

**Moses Serubiri,
32° East | Ugandan Arts Trust,
Uganda.**

“Defining artistic practice amidst political and economic pressures is challenging due to several factors, such as dated art curriculums, limited art infrastructures and ‘invisibility’, to name a few.”

In April 2015, 23 arts organizations gathered in Senegal, for the 2nd Arts Collaboratory Assembly. Following the 1st Arts Collaboratory Assembly in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, last year, this year’s meeting was hosted by Raw Material Company and Kër Thioossane in Dakar. The meeting aimed at forming a collective vision for the collaborative platform involving art spaces from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

The platform challenges alternative art contexts through nonlinear strategies. These include avoiding terms such as the ‘Global South’. As the director of the Arts Collaboratory facilitating partner institution, Casco, Binna Choi remarked: “We are trying to avoid definitive delineation.” She further explained this action as a gesture to create something else. This differs from the prevailing developmental separation of South and North.

Each organization in Arts Collaboratory struggles through these developmental definitions. Defining artistic practice amidst political and economic pressures is challenging due to several factors, such as dated art curriculums, limited art infrastructures and ‘invisibility’, to name a few. To rebut these factors, the arts organizations produce new forms of knowledge in the public sphere. Here a local audience and local artist community can address these limiting factors.

Cooperativa Cráter Invertido, an art collective in Mexico City, came out of similar circumstances. Beginning at an art college in Mexico, the group wanted to form a space of dialogue and exchanging ideas, as Cráter describes it: “It started as a project for us to discuss or to share time. We had a free library with a photocopy machine.”

At the early stages Cráter struggled to keep the public space open free of charge. The community kitchen they developed soon ran into issues of labor inside the college. “The school members were not prepared to work in a communitarian kitchen,” said Cráter.

After this episode Cráter Invertido would become more involved in Mexico City itself. Through collective actions they activated public spaces of dialogue. They responded to the War on Drugs through an art series in 2007, and developed a post-electoral hub to interrogate electoral fraud in 2012.

In the following year, the collective established an independent space in the city. They printed publications through outsourcing, until they

decided to get their own printer. This is when Cráter applied for an Arts Collaboratory grant.

For the most part, this strategy of collective knowledge production unified the Dakar assembly. It was no coincidence that the theme of the meeting was 'the common.' In relation to Senegal, this commonality resonated in a contemporary sense. Producing the Common was the theme of 2014 Dakar Biennale of Contemporary Art. The biennale focused on knowledge sharing across oceans, borders and cultures. It followed Édouard Glissant's notion of a 'poetics of relation'.

Taking the 'politics of relation', Arts Collaboratory's meeting interrogated funding structures and developmental definitions. All the while emphasizing the local experience of each art organization.

In this sense, the meeting was a form of 'creolization', to borrow Glissant's terminology. According to assembly organizer Marie-Helene Pereira, this succeeded through local and international linkages:

"All the people here are from different continents. They all want to gather to express their interest in the common. To reveal what they are doing in their own countries."

When asked why Senegal, Gertrude Flentge of DOEN Foundation, the Netherlands, concurred with Pereira and said: "Senegal is living in the translocal." Then gave a Senegalese example of a translocal cultural practice: "Tomorrow we will visit Ecole de Sables. It is an institution creating contemporary artistic languages born in Africa... the philosophy of Germaine Acogny [its founder] is not about fusing contemporary and African dance. It is about building a new contemporary language."

"All the people here are from different continents. They all want to gather to express their interest in the common. To reveal what they are doing in their own countries."

This emphasis on the locality of artistic language is not opposed to Glissant's theory. Relations can be forged through local art practices in marginalized art contexts. Here the politics of relation occurs through the Common.

Arts Schoolaboratory is an art education project founded during last year's assembly in Indonesia. The group's sense of Créolité is in their determination to challenge authority in art. When it does not suit their needs, participating organizations challenge the curriculums. This sense of Créolité is also echoed in the work of Cráter Invertido. That is, in their attempt at liberating artistic practice from within institutions.

Tony Evanko of Casa Tres Patios, Colombia, is one of the participants in Arts Schoolaboratory. His views affirm the vision of Cráter Invertido: "If we get young people involved in asking questions, they might not become artists. But they could become citizens that question their city and their government," he said.

This year's assembly has passed, and next year's assembly is on the horizon. The struggle continues for partners in each country. The struggle continues for art spaces to fill the gaps of an alternative art context. "We're questioning a lot through the workshops. That is what we're doing for now," said Gabriela Saenz-Shelby of TEOR/ética.