

# Tourism and contemporary arts: a particular case in Cultural Tourism

## *Turismo y artes contemporáneas: un caso particular en el Turismo Cultural*

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### Abstract

Contemporary arts are shifting most of our approaches to art: they disrupt the classical graphic arts –even those of the 20th century–, and invade unpredictable places, often with the complicity of local authorities. They also have to face a public that is predominantly unprepared but in the process of developing a new sensibility that leads to new aesthetics. This will, of course, impact strongly tourism, leading to new forms of cultural tourism. This paper describes this current phenomenon with a basic definition of what can be called Contemporary Arts and with the new trends of aesthetics. It then tackles both distinctive supply of Contemporary Arts and its demands. The paper concludes on how the tourism professionals favour their meeting within the destinations that are positioned on these forms of art, with either success or shortcomings. Contemporary Arts are a real and unprecedented challenge for cultural tourism.

**Key words:** Cultural Tourism, Contemporary Arts, Cultural Tourism Marketing.

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### Resumen

Las artes contemporáneas están desplazando la mayor parte de nuestros enfoques sobre el arte: perturban las artes gráficas clásicas -incluso las del siglo XX- e invaden lugares impredecibles, a menudo con la complicitad de las autoridades locales. Tienen que hacer frente también a un público que no está mayormente preparado, pero sí están en proceso de desarrollar una nueva sensibilidad hacia una nueva estética. Esto, por supuesto, va a repercutir fuertemente en el turismo, conduciendo a nuevas formas de turismo cultural. Este artículo describe este fenómeno actual con una definición básica de lo que se puede llamar Artes Contemporáneas y con las nuevas tendencias de la estética. A continuación, aborda los recursos distintivos de las Artes Contemporáneas y su demanda. El trabajo concluye analizando cómo los profesionales del turismo favorecen su encuentro dentro de los destinos posicionados en estas modalidades de arte, ya sea con éxito o con debilidades. Las expresiones artísticas contemporáneas son un desafío real y sin precedentes para el turismo cultural.

**Palabras clave:** turismo cultural, artes contemporáneas, marketing del turismo.

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## 1. Introduction on CAs/contemporary arts and travelling

In the next paragraph we propose a definition of the so-called Contemporary Arts which began in the 1960s. Hereafter, they are referred to as CAs. For several decades, the CAs seemed to play a specific but tiny role within cultural tourism; only very few niche tourists could be identified as CAs' tourists, who would visit artists' studios and run the major auctions in this field. However, at the turn of the Millenium, the topic of CAs emerged suddenly in the travel business, not only as an extra topic in the traditional cultural tourism, but also with particular features, unseen previously, in terms of audience travelling with this motivation, of unusual places to confront these kind of arts, and of revitalizing or destroying the traditional places of art exhibition. In this respect, we assume that, willingly or not, CAs are weaving a new kind of relations with the public because of their specific features, and that this has a particular impact on the way people travel, may they have some CAs as main motivation or only as occasional activity during their journey. These two ways of practising cultural tourism are fully developed (Origet du Cluzeau: 2013).

After a necessary definition of what we may consider as CAs, we shall investigate the new relations between the artists of CAs and their audience, the way the perception of beauty and arts is evolving, -in a word the particular aesthetics of CAs; by then, we shall be in a position to draw a first segmentation of the traveller involved in CAs. This will need further details on the numerous locations of CAs, which are direct components of the desire to travel, to visit and to experiment, and on the way the tourism industry meets these needs, or not.

## 2. What can be considered as contemporary arts?

Facing the difficulty of having a strict definition of what Contemporary Arts are, and are not, Catherine Millet, a well-known French art critic, made a survey in 2005 among 100 directors or curators of modern art museums around the world, to ask them how they would define Contemporary Arts. It ended in a consensus, expressed by the director of the Montreal Museum of CAs : " *Normally, CAs should be every piece of art made nowadays, but the way it is inspired makes the whole difference : CAs are in fact exploring new fields of creation, that take into account what our civilisations have accumulated ; they renew the forms of artistic expression and push forward the concept*" (Millet, 2008: 9 ). It began in the 1960s with, simultaneously, Pop Art, Op Art, Kinetic Art, Minimal Art, Arte Povera, Conceptual Art, Fluxus, Land Art, Street Art, Body-Art...like a virtuoso performance.

They rely on no special artistic school, but they have two particular features : first they use a wide variety of materials (textile, iron, plastic, wood, marble, paper, chewing gum, video... and already-made images...), including perishable ones for static or moving presentations ; second, they are totally porous as they constantly "contaminate" design, advertisement, tattoos, web, graffiti, , ... and the other way round. Their artists, provocative and/or seducers, clearly want the public to react. They don't pretend to be masters or genius (like Salvador Dali, but on a parodic way!), they don't claim perfection : they only run after a mental experience that they want to share. The audience perceives the disruptive forms of CAs, but recognizes that they are synchronized with their time. Therefore, the feeling of being pushed aside or just mocked, is fading away. Then certain parts of the public connive with these artists who are less ambitious than those who claimed to launch or illustrate a stage of art history. Amateurs and simple visitors of CAs look for an intellectual or a mental experience. Experience is the main concept, far from any analytical approach (Millet: 2008). Furthermore, there are so many CAs artists and trends that the role of the art critic became very tough, dubious. In no way, can there be an intellectual leadership in CAs, which leaves the audience to itself.

Since the 60s, there are no longer any Avant-Garde, with references to the past (or against the past) and giving birth to a new trend or a new school, with a name ending with...*ism*. Innovation and infringement have become the new rules. CAs have broken the flux of Avant-Garde that used to devastate the previous trend and, with fanfare, announce a new era in arts. The artist nowadays doesn't need to be damned in view of being praised later: he just may achieve his/her most fancy ideas and meets no limits, on the contrary: he/she is encouraged to proceed to questioning and provocation.

### 3. Aesthetics of CAs lead to a new relation with the public

As time goes by, our way of life changes and so does our way of perceiving. Art is nowadays spreading in numerous sectors : nice looking packaging, advertisement, decoration, displays, every object is carefully designed ; and it works the other way round : pieces of advertisement, brand names, press cuttings, and things belonging to everyday life can be used by the CAs, just like Marcel Duchamp's "ready made". In fact, there is an overall demand for art, spreading in daily life. Therefore, beauty is everywhere, except in arts, with its particular cultural consumption. Within CAs, innovation is more important than aesthetics and beauty : the important element is the message. As Luc Ferry (former French minister of culture) states the more ordinary the work, the more sophisticated the message. When a piece of art is new, with an inspiring power, an emotional value, and a global coherence, though expressed through parsimonious means, it hits the perception, and needs no further explanation. The artists of CAs are in no way activists like in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, -for instance as Picasso when he painted *Guernica*-. Nowadays, they remain inside their little communities and deliver no big message on politics or religion: their message is on themselves, on their mental experience. They are not either story-tellers: they are closer to musicians than to writers and just provide an atmosphere for an ephemeral experience.

We have now entered a new era where aesthetic experience and beauty invaded many aspects of daily life, and tourism, together with globalisation, has widely contributed to this situation as tourism facilitates -but also alters- the presentation of art, in a growing number of museums. Each year, 700 new museums are launched in the world and tourism participates greatly in their multiplication. Even the beach- or the snow-holidays have a touch of art and culture to complete the gratification. As a matter of fact, local identity can be grasped only through art, culture, cooking and folklore. Little by little, under the influence of tourism, museums are becoming places of entertainment, close to theme parks, instead of places of reverence. The visitor's capacity of attention is measured and taken into account, just like a market. Thus, art becomes a recreation. We are no longer in the contemplation of a creation, but absorbed in an aesthetic relation. The image and the experienced sensation no longer depend on what the author has meant but on the way the audience reacts, rejects or enjoys. Art depends closely on its interpretation and on the type of artistic environment in which it is presented.

The artist is no longer a producer of an object of art but the producer of an encounter of illusions, of magic... in his/her so-called "composition, variation, concept, performanc...". And there are so many artists that they lost their intensity, though they are as clever as ever. In the Western World, there have never been so many artists; for example, there are 100 000 of them who live in New York City.

These artists focus no longer on the work itself, but on its impact on the audience, with its volatile aesthetic quality, and this is less a relation between the one who looks and the work itself, than a feeling of the ambiance. Then art is like a perfume, a decoration, an ephemeral ritual, a tattoo...More and more, paintings are replaced by photographs, adding urgency to the image. As the Dutch-American painter Bill de Kooning would state that its content is a glimpse. In this view, there is a constant need for cultural events.

Furthermore, the fact that any piece of art can be easily reproduced, that we can get countless copies of almost anything, the piece of art loses its aura: this particular vulnerable way of existing, of being located in time and space, of belonging to a tradition and a story. Reproduction makes it highly accessible.

Therefore, may he/she be a local resident or a tourist, the visitor is in the middle of an aesthetic experience and the feelings elicited by this experience rely mainly on him/her ; we must here recall that, for the past three or four decades, the cultural visitor is no longer influenced by critics or by any "educational authority" : he/she has his/her own aesthetic sense, he/she is an aesthete on his own and, with the CAs, is the co-producer of an experience. This is a totally new way of practising cultural tourism (Origet du Cluzeau, 2013: 81). Furthermore, CAs are difficult to mention in a detailed way in a guidebook and tour-guides are rare on this topic; furthermore, CAs are not often ambassadors of a local identity. And CAs always give an impression of incomplete. These different features of cultural tourism in CAs are disrupting those of traditional cultural tourism; nowadays, the cultural travellers have not really changed their global expectations and the organization of their journey, but the tourists who are fond of CAs have profiles that are typically those of the new global era.

#### 4. Segmentation of contemporary arts tourists

This tourist of the coming era, open to any production of CAs, is best described by Yves Michaud " *the tourist is typically this contemporary man, this serial individual with a multiple but partitioned life, mobile, curious and anxious, who travels across all borders, wants to catch everything from inside and on the spot, changes constantly his distinctions (between here/there, centre/periphery), searching truth and authenticity, in spite of the adulterated forms that tourism experience provides him. This is why every tourist claims to be more than an ordinary tourist, at least "not like the others": he would like to feel better, different, more authentic*" (Michaud, 2016:190).

In spite of these pretty complex and unprecedented mind features, our tourists of CAs can easily fit into some classical segmentation, for the sake of the tourism actors. They can be divided into:

- Great amateurs, collectors, who can move from one art fair to another in the world, as well as run to auctions, galleries and visit privately an artist in his studio. Among them are also people who will bet on new artist, not really speculators, because these people like to bring to light an artist and thus participate in a new trend. For these people, CAs are a strong trigger and can even be a unique reason to travel. Those are small numbers (compared to the whole cultural tourism flows) but high spending travellers and their number as travellers should rise: there were about 500 000 great collectors in the world in the 1950s; they now amount to 70 M!.
- Fair amateurs of CAs, who occasionally will buy a lithography or a small piece of art, often during short breaks in large cities, where visiting exhibitions and fairs are their major, but not only, purpose. They also participate in guided tours organized by highly specialised incoming agencies such as Go Art in Berlin or Art Process in Paris.
- Eclectics: those are the most common visitors of museums, fond of every kind of art, including the CAs. Those travellers may be just adding the CAs to their many objects of curiosity or some may feel a deep attraction to the art productions that express their time and synchronize with it. In Western Europe, they are part of those 33% of the population that regularly go to museums and are city-break addicts. By far, this could be the largest segment in the flows of CAs visitors. No wonder that they are the main targets of tourism communication and advertisement (Prentice, 2001).
- Onlookers: those are interested in anything to discover during their holidays, and they are due to meet CAs when those are exposed in the open during an event (such as the White Nights in Rome and Paris), in an outdoors exhibition or in a permanent display. Many contemporary artists are fond of this particular audience, more fresh, less prejudiced than the three former ones, less cultivated too, and sometimes accompanied by young children (an even fresher audience!). They may like, or dislike, what they see, but, displayed as it is, they cannot avoid it. Some of them, apparently very few, will join one of the three other segments.

#### 5. Where? Everywhere?

CAs are more or less invading an unprecedented number of places, under the influence of two major trends or pressures:

- The first one is that of the artists, who wish to see their works in the traditional places of exhibitions (museums, galleries, art fairs...) as well as in the most unusual ones; there are now countless industrial derelicts transformed into open places of exhibitions, with walls and plants full of graffiti and huge sculptures, leading, downtown, to Street Art, and, in the countryside, to Land Art;

- The second one follows this global trend: local authorities –and especially municipalities of large cities- place orders to artists, for events or for a permanent display in the open in order to renew the atmosphere and the image of their city. As such, they receive a lot of communication –a free advertisement for their destination- as this is an excellent and ever renewed topic for the media. Furthermore, this Street Art has often ended up with the gentrification of a district. Like Soho in New-York.

A further investigation within the many places where the public can be confronted to CAs gives a clearer view on the kind of cultural tourism they may arouse or at least favour.

**Events.** Events are meant for ephemeral and spectacular experiences, and also to test the success of a new concept. In this respect, they totally synchronize with the CAs. Among these events, art fairs must be mentioned first: such as Art Basel (which takes place in Basel but also in Miami and Hong-Kong), FIAC in Paris, ARCO in Madrid, FRIEZE in London... There are also some secondary or emerging art fairs such as the Biennial Arts Festival in Dakar/Senegal, with the participation of about 20 African countries (Congo for instance is known world wide for its graffers). More dedicated to the specialists, the major auctions also draw collectors from around the world. Auctions are huge events, stimulating the need to sell and the desire to buy ; these people often pay more attention to the 5 sq cm of the signature than to the 2 sq meters of the work says Alex Million, auctioneer. The average price in the world for CAs auctions is 5 000 € (ref Art Price).

For a wider public, large exhibitions of CAs are an opportunity to trigger city-breaks in major cities, where they often elicit repeat visitors, who have already visited “the old city” and want to keep track of what the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is providing there.

**Traditional cultural sites.** More and more large cities in the world now have their dedicated CAs Museum, often linked with collections of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, known as “Modern Art”; thus linking both is a way of helping the visitor to understand the latest works of art and to insure a better venue for the place. Some are public, with public funding and donations; others are private and their curators are often actors in the international art market where they can buy, or re-sell some of their treasures.

CAs are not always adapted to the museums: because of the size of the works, because they use perishable materials, totally in contradiction with the objective of conservation in the museums. But there is also a much more tricky challenge for the museums: what should the curator buy ? what are his choice criterias ? Sometimes, the answer is fairly easy: the curator will choose the work of a local artist. But, besides this good reason, we trust that he must sometimes feel very lonely ! The museum of Grenoble/France is committed to buy 5 pieces of CAs each year, and the choice must be uneasy.

Furthermore, one of the top responsibilities of the museum is to give a meaning to the exhibited works; consequently, these two facts – how to choose and how to explain- need a reasonable delay. This is why traditional museums, who do not want to ignore the contemporary artists, place them a few orders and prefer to have them in temporary exhibitions than in their permanent collections. As far as museums are concerned, we need to mention in France the so-called FRAC/Regional Funds for CAs which are committed, since 1983, to buy every year several works of CAs from the regional artists. Those works are chosen by a technical committee. In some regions, the FRACs succeeded at creating their own museum or exhibition centre, such as Marseilles and Orleans.

Here we wish to raise a controversial topic: some traditional and internationally known museums and monuments invite artists of CAs for temporary exhibitions within their well-known premises, their works being presented amid the old furniture and classical works of the place. This gives way to spectacular views of pieces of CAs, in contrast with the old building and its old collections. We all remember how the international media communicated on the exhibition of Jeff Koons in the main royal premises of Château de Versailles. Artists as the Belgian Wim Delvoye or the French Jean-Michel Othoniel claim that their work is in perfect harmony with the place and in continuation with the past. It is of course excellent for the artist’s reputation and quoted value, as well as for the curators who gain respect from their peers (curators in Europe are not evaluated according to the number of visitors and to their satisfaction, but according to their peers’ assessment!). But a survey made in Versailles in 2016 during the

Anish Kapoor exhibition showed that many visitors had the feeling of being hostages. In our opinion, works of CAs displayed in a traditional museum or monument, tend to cannibalize and alter completely the place ; they betray the first-time visitor who has been expecting, sometimes since decades, to see the dwelling. In Le Louvre and Versailles, more than 60% of visitors are first-time comers, not repeat-visitors, and they have expectations that deserve respect. CAs in those old surroundings are fun, and they renew the image of the place says the visitor with high education and long-time experience of museums. In this case, let them take pictures of this display of CAs in the old place early in the morning, and put everything back when the place opens to its visitors. For the sake of these visitors, let's respect the spirit of the surroundings. In some other places like West French Brittany, where CAs are exposed in a series of chapels, there is a Chart of Art in the Chapels, stating a few regulations and inviting the artists to respect and converse with the place.

**Cities.** Cities such as Los Angeles or Lille in France have been deeply involved in CAs since 30 years. They not only multiply their dedicated museums and places of exhibition, they also take firm positions in this respect. Some cities have strongly bet mainly on CAs, such as Martigny/Switzerland, or Bilbao. They often find it most suitable to fit with modern architecture, within dedicated areas, as in Panama City or in Paris/La Défense District where works of CAs are displayed, giving way to passionate comments, either enthusiastic or hostile. However, within the city, the municipality may also have placed a public order, as was the case with Christo in Berlin (coverage of the Reichstag) or in Paris (coverage of the Pont Neuf).

But there are also illegal painters who have stealthily covered some walls during the night and such may be either soon wiped off or remain to the point of becoming an attraction; the most notorious of these furtive street painters or "graffers" is probably the British tagger Banksy –who adorned many walls in Bristol and other cities-. By now, Street Art has become very trendy. Street Art tries to alter the significance of the street or reveal a social protest, which may make it very attractive to both residents and tourists. It sometimes ends up disclosing an unknown district or renew the image of the place. It gives rise to urban visits, such as the guided tours in Philadelphia dedicated to the local Street Art. And hundreds of art galleries now exhibit so-called Street Art, thus breaking the feeling of free access.

In spite of globalisation, namely the globalisation of art auctions, the local galleries remain significant in the eyes of the amateurs, thus eliciting international travelling. Art galleries keep the flavour of the region or country in which they are located. They are everywhere famous for their role in discovering new talents. All the buzz on CAs in the urban areas is a contribution to the reputation of the city as a modern destination for tourism. No wonder they are more or less accepted or encouraged.

**Outdoors trails.** The last years have witnessed quite a number of initiatives in CAs in the countryside: for instance with Land Art, and with trails such as the Vasarely Trail between Avignon, Gordes and Aix-en-Provence, or the 5km long avenue decorated with Street Art along Canal St Denis (North of Paris) or the cross-border mountain trail of CAs between Digne (France) and Caraglio (Italy) with 20 spots dedicated to CAs, mainly with Land Art and so called "*art refuges*". Schad's trail, a German sculptor, who displayed, in 2016, several works in Finistère/French Brittany is such another example. The latter is exhibited in small chapels and, once again, the question of respect to the spirit of the place can be put forward.

Of course, these outdoors exhibitions, permanent or temporary, attract visitors that would not have entered a real intimidating museum to contemplate CAs. Subsequently, these new flows of audience are partly generated by tourism.

**Other tourism venues.** Furthermore, one needs to also mention those many touristic wine cellars, already main attractions, that are renewing their premises as well as their image with a display of CAs: Saint-Emilion/Cheval Blanc near Bordeaux, Pommery champagne cellars in Reims, Marques de Riscal in the Rioja wine area, ... here one will often find a common client, the wine amateur and the CAs amateur !

In this respect, Japan is maybe well ahead on the sophisticated way of combining tourism and CAs: on the three islands of Naoshima (4 500 inhabitants), off Okayama, where several CAs museums can be found, with one of them (Benesse House) providing also hotel accommodation and restaurant and thus offering the visitors a stay dedicated to Japanese CAs.

Contemporary artists are particularly lucky: their works are displayed in a very wide variety of places. And tourism locations are among them: the sculptor Richard Orlinski has often been shown in luxury hotels in Cannes and Courchevel (French Alps). The Méridien hotel chain calls upon contemporary designers and,

with the help of the curator Jérôme Sans, each of its hotels in the world has special links with a local cultural institution oriented towards the future of creation. The former Palace of Justice in Nantes/France was transformed into a hotel with 136 rooms and a 500 sq meter CAs gallery. During a year, a temporary hotel room, designed by S. Lang and D. Baumann, appeared on the roof of the Paris Museum of Modern Arts. Ferran Adria, famous chef of El Bulli near Gerone, was called as artist at the CAs exhibition of La Documenta in Kassel in 2007... Examples of the kind are becoming countless and worldwide.

This is a result of globalisation in which tourism is a strong contributor. It ends up with some sort of standardisation of practices, some common imaginary but also a great opportunity for personalising the destinations.

## 6. Travelling for CAs or bumping into CAs during a journey

As mentioned above, those who travel mainly for the purpose of CAs are more or less a niche market, but a very affluent one indeed. Therefore, a number of incoming travel agencies and small tour-operators exploit this market, providing them with profitable flight tickets and hotel bookings, and less profitable guided tours within museums, exhibitions –often with privileged services such as visitations during closing hours- or visits to art galleries and artists’ studio. Thus, the agency has a strong knowledge on the actors of CAs, and can provide exclusive services, especially in the so-called “out of the beaten tracks”. But, as usual in cultural tourism, the profit of the tourism professionals comes from the margin on transportation and accommodation bookings, whereas what makes it attractive and decisive to the client is the purely cultural part. Some of those specialized tour-operators are well known such as Art Travel Desk and Go Art in Berlin, Drouot Voyages and Art Process in Paris, Viatorcom in New-York, Vietnamanz in the ASEAN countries.

Besides these very specialized agencies, the other tour-operators, proposing tours and city-breaks, have just included portions of CAs in their programs, often with no particular knowledge on them. Guide books are not often talkative on CAs. Presentations of CAs can more often be found in dedicated art books and on the web, where the initiative belongs to the artists and their agents, such as the galleries; but they are not particular travel triggers. Therefore, it is the duty of the local tourism office to promote its works of CAs to the tourists. TurismoTorino does it, so does SPOT in Lyon. But, in this respect, it needs a very careful communication: a communication really directed to the visitors it may interest, and not to those visitors who may be reluctant to CAs or had other expectations when they reached the destination.

## 7. Conclusion

Since years, we have been convinced that the best pool of new visitors to cultural sites are the tourists: because they are in a new context, drawn away from their usual agenda and habits, open to exoticism and to discovering the local identity, more mentally inclined to devote time and money, if need be. Is this happening with the CAs?

As mentioned above, CAs are no longer exhibited only in secluded places: the tourists may just bump into some of them wherever they are displayed. And this may provide new amateurs; it may raise their awareness and their liking, or their dislike. Even if their confrontation with CAs leads to a feeling of synchronization with the present time, one of the main obstacles to their becoming amateurs, -and therefore repeat visitors- is the significant number of artists, of trends and works, which makes the situation unclear and difficult to grasp; furthermore, the adoption is poorly helped by the traditional go-betweens, who are the key to understanding and appreciating. Those that are discovering CAs are on their own to value them, with their personal aesthetics. This is a big challenge for tourism destinations that have added CAs to their cultural resources.

These totally new ways of presenting CAs to the public, and the way the public reacts could open a new era for cultural tourism, more experiential, more contemporary and then in sharp contrast with the traditional cultural tourism that looks more towards the past. CAs as tourism motivation or activity launch a new form of cultural tourism, with, hopefully, renewed clients. But a serious effort in marketing still needs to be accomplished in order to make that the potential visitors are targeted as new clients and later as repeat visitors. It is the tourism actors’ job, point of honour and duty, to lead them in this direction.

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