

***Muntadas: Asian Protocols* Artist Interview:**

Perception Requires Participation

Antoni Muntadas (Born in Barcelona, Spain, 1942) now lives in New York and operates art projects all around the world. His works have been exhibited in MoMA in New York, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, Modern Art Museum in Rio de Janeiro, Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art and other famous museums.

He was invited to Kassel Documenta (1977,1997), Whitney Biennial (1991), 51th Venice Biennale (2005), international biennales in Rio de Janeiro, Lyon, Taipei, Gwangju, Havana and so on. Also he received awards from Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, US National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, Prix national des arts plastiques français , Premio Nacional de Arts Plàstics España (2005), The Premio Velázquez de las Artes Plàstics (2009) and so on. Muntadas taught at MIT (Cambridge, MA) for over 30 years. Meanwhile, he gave lectures and hold seminars in Europe, the US, South America and China. He was hired as a visiting professor in the Central Academy of Fine Arts. Moreover, he was invited to participate in art residence projects and work as a counsellor for multiple famous researches and education centres. Currently, he is working as a visiting professor in Università IUAV di Venezia.

Talk with Artist

When this project started, I was teaching at MIT. I designed a public space-themed project for a seminar, which discusses the similarities and differences among various regions all over the world. I investigated on cities, including Rio de Janeiro, Tijuana, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. When we start to explore large cities in Asia, I decided to explore Seoul, Tokyo and Beijing. The purpose is to compare these cities with Boston, where we work. Through the comparison, we can find some similarities and differences. The first trip of me and MIT students drives me to consider the similarities and differences among Korea, China and Japan. Since 2011, I started this project—*Asian Protocols*. Some similarities, some differences and some conflicts appeared on the surface. I spent 2 years with researchers to construct and prepare for this project. The project in the Total Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul is part of the overall project, and also the starting point of the whole framework. After that, investigations are rarely overlapped with each other, because every place is unique, so it is hard to predict what will happen next. However, the investigation in Korea can help me to better understand the situation in Tokyo and Beijing.

Q: You mentioned “Perception Requires Participation” in your work. What’re your opinions on the relationship between audience and work?

The audience, or the public are the people who finalize this project. I think the audience is the person who gives the final interpretation of the work in certain extent. Everyone has his interpretation, because everyone owns different information and perspective. The way you understand this work is different from the way other people understand it. I think this point is crucial. I have been interested in themes like translation and interpretation for several years. To create a complete perception towards a work, it is important to leave everyone the freedom of interpretation.

Asian Protocols: Cartographies

Q: You are not an Asian expert. how do you know about Asian culture through these works?

As an outsider, I was a foreigner who tries to understand these three countries and three cities. I observe and feel these three places which shares the same cultural background. Nevertheless, these three countries take different organizing approaches in culture, economics and politics. *Asian Protocols* is a project of watching. Because I don’t know the languages of these three countries. I make use of my eyes to absorb, to watch and to feel things. This research project mainly is a visual project, made up of several small projects. Six in Korea, two in Japan and two in China (creation). Eventually, these small projects should be viewed as a whole. They complement each other rather than being isolated separately. They form an interdependent network together.

Blackboard Dialog: Redefining Asian Protocols, (2014-2018)

Asian Protocols starts from Korea in 2014, then Japan in 2016, and finally Beijing, China in 2018. I spent two years to focus on every culture and add new work to the project. For example, works made in Korea. Some of them use the same presenting way as in Korea, but some of them are edited depending on the context. For example, the work *Blackboard Dialog* was exhibited in Korea, Japan and China. It kept changing along the way based on the dialogue that happened between me and researchers and how they respond to my questions. The work is similar, but the response is different. It is essential to observe how the same question is answered in different ways.

Q: Are you questioning societies in three countries of Japan, South Korea, and China through your work, from the perspective of a Westerner?

I am not questioning but observing. Observe, analyze and try to understand. I don’t choose to question because you can only question something when you know a lot about it. Some of them are one direction, and some of them are other directions. Therefore, I regard this work as a complementary one. Some are more profound, while others are like a constant observation, a posture or a feedback. At least, I am not questioning. If you want to question something,

you need to be very familiar with it. I am trying to pose questions to myself and the audience. Through this way, the audience is also posing questions to themselves. It may also relate to their self-created answers. Moreover, those answers will help me to understand better.