

THE ART NEWSPAPER

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State of the unions: a 'new renaissance' at US museums

With the arts sector increasingly vulnerable in the wake of the pandemic, a new breed of digitally optimised worker is taking on employers

By Tom Seymour

NEW YORK. In July 2020, during a general meeting for staff at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, Richard Armstrong, the director, pledged to "extend my [salary] reduction as long as necessary". Armstrong promised to cut his own earning while seeking to justify the need to lay off 11% of the contracted workforce in the wake of the "devastating impact" of Covid-19 measures. In all, 24 workers lost their employment outright, while an additional eight people accepted voluntary separation packages.

In fact, Armstrong would soon pocket a massive increase in take-home pay. Recent public records revealed Armstrong's earnings swelled by more than \$400,000 between 2019 and 2020, a real-terms pay increase of more than 40%.

The leadership of the museum

appears to have privately done the exact opposite of what it pledged to do in public. In its defence, the museum stated that Armstrong's pay increase was due to "deferred compensation" – part of his multi-year contract determined by the board in 2019, which allows employees to collect income at a later date. Still, the timing was awkward.

Once upon a time, a person of Armstrong's standing might have hoped that the figures, buried in the Guggenheim's 990 IRS filings, would simply be quietly filed away in the dusty recesses of a public archive. But a *Better Guggenheim*, a newly emergent union of staff members who organise anonymously, evade detection and are native digital operators, made sure the particulars of Armstrong's remuneration went viral.

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Victims of war in Ukraine, past—and future?

The old make wars to satisfy their craving for power; the young die in them or are broken in mind and body. Yet wars keep on being manufactured and another one may be just days away. At time of writing, there were an estimated 125,000 Russian troops gathered at the border with Ukraine. This threatens to be an international war, but an internal conflict has been smouldering in the Donbas region of Ukraine ever since Russia fomented and supported a civil war there in 2014. The UN estimates that more than 13,000 people

have died, and many more have had their lives changed for ever.

This image is from the series *Wounds* by the US photographer of Ukrainian descent Joseph Sywenkyj, a prize winner at Photo Kyiv 2021. It depicts Andriy Zabihaiko, who lost a leg when the tank he was commanding was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade in 2014.

Sywenkyj tells the stories of injured Ukrainians, but it should go without saying that on the Russian side, the young have also died and have been broken in mind and body. **A.S.C.**

Booking system is deterring museum visits

MUSEUMS

By Martin Bailey

LONDON. The UK's national museums are reviewing whether to continue the present booking system, introduced because of Covid-19. Last month's apparent easing of the pandemic and loosening of government restrictions means that museums will now be reconsidering whether to continue to issue tickets for their permanent collections.

Booking with free tickets makes it possible to control numbers at a time when social distancing is desirable. However, checks by *The Art Newspaper* on availability suggest that tickets may have become an unnecessary encumbrance.

On the morning of Monday 24 January, all slots were available for the entire week at the National Gallery, Tate, British Museum and Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A). Only the V&A appears to get partially booked up just before the weekends, presumably because it is currently closed on Mondays and Tuesdays.

The main argument against a ticketed system is that it acts as a deterrent, particularly for visitors wanting to drop in at the last minute. It often seems confusing and results in fewer visitors, reducing self-generated income from catering and shops.

The latest available visitor data for all the UK's national museums is for July–September 2021. They received 5 million visitors, compared with 14.2 million in the same period in 2019, with much of the fall due to minimal international tourism. Total self-generated

income fell from £329m in 2019/20 to £144m in the last financial year.

A National Gallery spokesperson says that "we are keeping our ticketing situation under constant review, while taking the latest advice regarding Covid-19 into account".

At the British Museum, a spokesperson explains: "We advise visitors to book a timed slot to guarantee entry and provide the best visitor experience. Walk-up visits are available each day for those who arrive without advance bookings. We review the situation regularly and have no plans to change these arrangements at present."

Meanwhile, a Tate spokesperson

says: "We have kept a free booking system in place throughout the pandemic, which remains under constant review as we continue to respond to new variants and guidelines. Visitors are very welcome without pre-booking and it is quick and easy to get a free ticket on arrival at the gallery."

The V&A operates what it calls "a hybrid walk-up and ticketed model". In planning ahead, the V&A "will be considering whether there are any benefits in continuing with the hybrid model".

It is likely that the national museums will try to act in unison, possibly in the spring, since different admission systems would sow further confusion.



Vari-coloured gem and enamel pendant necklace by Louis Comfort Tiffany, c.1910

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Head to head: *Cabbage (and Philip) No. 24* (2020), one of a series of paintings by Katz featuring the brassica—and the shadow of her partner looming in the background

The Big Review: Allison Katz in London

“Head, heart, capillaries: the shape and texture of the cabbage is horribly vulnerable, an organ sliced off at the stem.” Brian Dillon on the bodily, literary and art historical richness of the Canadian painter’s work, on view at Camden Art Centre // page 45

EXHIBITIONS

Interview

Joël Andrianomearisoa: 'My ideas can come from the look in someone's eye or in an emotion I suddenly experience'

As the first museum devoted to contemporary art opens in Antananarivo, Madagascar, the artist who is the museum's artistic director reflects on how the island country and his adoptive home, Paris, have affected his practice. By **Tom Seymour**

Joël Andrianomearisoa was born in Antananarivo, Madagascar, and studied architecture at Paris's École Spéciale d'Architecture. He exhibited for the first time at the French capital's Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris (MAM) in 2000 in the group show *Paris Pour Escala* (Paris stopover) and is currently exhibiting in MAM's neighbouring museum, the Palais de Tokyo, in the group show *Ubuntu, a Lucid Dream – his neon fit nous portons tous les rêves du monde* (Here we reach all the dreams of the world, 2021) hangs over the museum's entrance.

Andrianomearisoa's work takes multiple forms, including photography, textiles, sculpture and installation, but often relates to his architectural studies in its engagement with space and environment. He has also strayed into other disciplines, including collaborations with Christian Dior and the perfume brand Diptyque. Black is the dominant colour of his work.

He represented Madagascar at the Venice Biennale in 2019, the first time his country had participated. He spoke to *The Art Newspaper* on a recent return visit to Venice ahead of the opening of Hakanto Contemporary, a new Antananarivo museum dedicated to contemporary Malagasy art, where he has been appointed as artistic director.

THE ART NEWSPAPER: How would you describe your upbringing?

JOËL ANDRIANOMEARISOA: I was born in 1977, in Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar, high up in the mountains. We were a very normal family, without any relationship to art. My grandfather was an engineer. My mother worked in a bank and my father was a teacher. I was brought up in a very classical, traditional way. Art appeared for the first time when I was about 15 or 16; I remember telling my parents I had a desire to pursue some kind of creativity, but I didn't know what kind. I remember, for some years, I felt a little bit lost. I tried many things in small ways – design, fashion, art. But I didn't really know what I was doing. That began to change when I decided to study architecture in Paris.

Madagascar has more endemic and unique species of animals and plants than anywhere on the planet. How would you describe it to someone who has never experienced it?

I can't answer the question because I don't know enough about my country. The beauty of Madagascar is its mystery. It is three times bigger than France; it is too big to understand, too much to embrace at the same time. But I know



Above: Andrianomearisoa's sculpture, *Dancing with the Angels* (2021) at the Palais de Tokyo, one of his large-scale pieces that nod to his architectural training. Below: the artist, in trademark black, which he says is "not only a colour, but also an attitude"

Antananarivo well; it's a city between Rome, London and Lisbon. There's a lot of British sophistication, because we were a British colony. We love drinking tea, we have a long tradition of British architecture; some of our streets look like London. But we also take a lot of inspiration from Portugal, from France, from Italy. We are close to Africa, but, culturally, sometimes I think we are more related to Asia. If I travel to Japan or Thailand or India, I find things that remind me of Antananarivo.

You left Antananarivo to study in Paris as a teenager. What was your initial experience of Paris like?

I remember, when I arrived there, feeling I had discovered life. It was very personal to me. In Paris, there is something to do all the time; the activity, the energy, the diversity – it's always there. When I went back to Antananarivo, at night it was more quiet than I could have imagined. I studied at the École Spéciale d'Architecture in Paris until I was 24. I studied architecture, but they were always telling me that architecture is not the point. It's more the discussion about the idea of architecture. That was interesting to



me. As I studied, I began to become surrounded by contemporary art. I met some interesting people in Paris; curators, artists, writers. They became my education, my school. I graduated as an architect and I had the option of perhaps returning to Madagascar

and building a primary school or something. But I really jumped into art.

At what point in your life did you start to identify as an artist?

It took me more than ten years to decide properly I was an artist. But the decision was not only mine, actually. The decision came more from the professional world I was in. I spent the decade going through a period of research and experimentation. But I was not ready. It was only when I began to properly show my work, when I started to be represented by a gallery, when I entered the market in some way, that I was able to define myself as an artist. But I don't think I decided alone that I would have a career as an artist. I think other professionals decide that for you.

How do you develop your ideas?

My work often comes from within myself. This can take time, because I can't tell you exactly when and where I will get an idea. My ideas can come to me on a plane or a train, in bed or in a restaurant. It can come from the look in someone's eye or in an emotion I suddenly experience. But it always starts with words. I am in Venice now,

Biography

Born: 1977 Antananarivo, Madagascar
Lives: Antananarivo and Paris
Education: 2003 Diplôme d'architecte, École Spéciale d'Architecture, Paris
Key shows: 2021 Kunsthalles Praha, Prague; Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration, Paris; 2020 Dallas Contemporary; 2020 Biennale of Sydney; 2019 Venice Biennale; Manifesta, Lyon; 2018 MAXXI, Rome
2017 National Museum of African Art, Washington, DC; Museu Afro Brasil, São Paulo; 2016 Biennale of Contemporary African Art, Dakar, Senegal; 2013 Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Grand Palais, Paris; 2008 Studio Museum, Harlem, New York; 2005 Centre Pompidou, Paris; Hayward Gallery, London; 2000 Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris
Represented by: Sabrina Amrani Gallery, Madrid

and on the plane into Venice I found myself writing quickly in my notebook. At some point these words began to turn into drawings, then sketches. And at that point my architectural process begins, and it becomes about space, materials, temporalities.

You showed in the Madagascar pavilion at the 2019 Venice Biennale. If Madagascar is too big to understand, how did you represent it? Representing a country at Venice is more than just a challenge, because you're not just an artist. You become, at a certain point, an ambassador, of your art and also of your country. You carry your country on the top of your head in front of the world. And this is heavy. The day I realised I would represent Madagascar in a pavilion at the Arsenale in Venice, I was proud, happy and excited. But the second day, I thought: "How am I going to deal with this?" I found a lot of people were suddenly wanting to give me advice; telling me I had to represent this or that and include this traditional thing or take inspiration from that part of our culture. As I was listening to them, I felt myself getting bored, and I felt I was becoming more stupid. So I decided to remove everything. I said to myself: "I'm going to represent Madagascar, but, to represent it better, to love it better, I'm going to forget Madagascar." I decided to be sincere with myself. And to say that I am a legacy of the country. I'm from Madagascar. My blood is my legacy. I am part of it.

You have two upcoming exhibitions – at Zeitz Moco in Cape Town and at Maaal in Marrakech. What aspects of your practice will you explore in these very distinct spaces?

I am the atrium artist this year for Zeitz Moco. It's a big mission. It's going to connect to the show I did in Venice. I will create a huge installation made with black paper. It will be a labyrinth. I want it to be very radical. For Marrakech, I am trying to work beyond the idea of a solo show. We're going to invade the museum; the gardens, the stairs, the bathrooms, the shops. I will show paintings, drawings, textiles. There will be sculptures in the garden, objects for the shop, food designed by me in the restaurant. I will be working with Moroccan techniques throughout and everything will be produced in Morocco. I will move my studio there, and we will work, create, think and produce in this very inspiring location.

• **Ny Fitavianay (Our Love/Notre Amour, curated by Joël Andrianomearisoa, Hakanto Contemporary, Antananarivo, until 16 March; Ubuntu, a Lucid Dream, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, until 20 February; his exhibition at Zeitz Moco, Cape Town, opens in June (dates tbc) and the show at Maaal, Marrakech, opens 23 September**