

SALLY TALLANT:

Thank you so much for the invitation to be here today. I'm going to talk a little bit about the Serpentine for those of you who may not have been there, then I'm going to run through our programs and show you some images of the gallery and some of the work that we've been doing but I want to talk about it in line with our current thinking in relation to our very recent expansion.

I think one of the challenges that we're all facing and particularly one of the challenges that faces publicly-funded institutions, certainly in the UK, is that the recent competition from the private sector, the reduction of public funding, the pressures of reinvention and creating an institution which can both thrive within and look to the future and exceed the current situation leads to us having to rethink everything that we're doing. And so I want to talk a little bit about our thoughts and the direction that we see ourselves progressing in.

So at the Serpentine Gallery, we present exhibitions, we present architecture and design, we have an education program and we have recently built a whole series of expanded programs which you will see developing over the next three years.

This is the Serpentine Gallery, for those of you who haven't been there. It is a relatively small institution but it -- we -- in fact, it was built in 1934 as a tea room but despite its scale, we have 713,000 visitors a year and actually, that's increased 92 percent since 2005 and we are one of the only publicly-funded institutions in the UK that is open seven days a week and that maintains free admission.

We only receive 15.69 percent, as you can see there, public subsidy, although we still define ourselves as a publicly-funded institution. What that means is that we have to raise the rest from trust foundations, private individuals and corporates and I think that that's really changed how we see ourselves and changed how we think about ourselves looking to the future and, I think before I go onto that, I think in particular, it's made us face up to asking ourselves very difficult questions about what it is that the function of

public institutions is in the 21st century, how we define ourselves as different from private institutions and how we can really contribute to the sector through non-commercial activities.

And I think London at the moment is experiencing an incredible expansion in terms of the contemporary arts, institutions such as Tate Modern and London's number one tourist attraction and I think Tate's activity, alongside lots of other larger institutions, as well as the commercial sector building really quite large galleries that are operating very much like traditionally like museums. I mean, Serpentine and galleries like Serpentine have to look at other programs and think about what it is that we can contribute to that sector which can meaningfully reinvent it and offer opportunities that are distinctive both for artists, curators and somehow, that can work towards defining a cultural sector which is not reduced straightforwardly to being dominated by commercial propositions.

We are also working towards the Olympics in 2012 which impacts all -- we are about to be impacted on that, I think, on the funding to the art sector. The government in the UK, the department for culture, media and sport, that final word I think is very important, "sport" because obviously, I think some of the funding which will be charged into the arts and culture may well find itself dripping into the sport sector.

So I want to -- I want to talk to you very briefly, some of our history. We present about six exhibitions a year, a year of modern contemporary art. We work with significant artists giving them an opportunity to present themselves for the very first time to UK audiences. This is actually a pre-renovation shot of the Serpentine and we were very lucky to receive luxury money in 1998 and were able to -- this enabled us to do a number of things. One was to rebuild the gallery and give it museum conditions in order for us to be able to present different quality of exhibition but also it enabled us to work with artists such as Richard Wilson to try to break down the gallery a bit, just pre-renovation.

We work across a whole wide range of media and where possible, commission artists to make work that they wouldn't be able to make

in any other space. We worked with Doug Aitken to make a work which not only redefined the interior spaces of the gallery but also, you can see the light there at the top of the gallery in the cupola. This was a light that swung around the gallery and illuminated the whole park and the surrounding area. And I think that's the work that was ultimately site-specific and obviously can adapt to another space but we were very interested in what people can uniquely do at the Serpentine.

A lot of the artists we've worked with, we were able to give them their very first time so their presentation in the UK, whether that's British artists, international artists or artists who, perhaps are incredibly well-known but whose work we feel needs a particular focus. Given our scale, we can't do the big retrospectives like the bigger exhibitions that the much larger institutions can do but what we can do is give work a very specific and particular focus and be able to show work in a way that -- that can perhaps give artists a very specific opportunity.

We also present at least one great exhibition a year and the purpose of that is to present international often although this was specific to provide artists currently living in the USA to present tendencies and also to be able to contextualize their work within contemporary genre and practice.

The Serpentine uniquely commissions architecture and rather than presenting exhibitions of architecture, what we prefer to do is invite architects who at the point of invitation, have never previously built a building in the UK before so this started with Zaha Hadid, moved on to Daniel Libeskind in 2001, and Toyo Ito in 2002. These structures not only provide the public with an opportunity to actually experience architecture which is a very different thing than perhaps looking at models or exhibitions of architecture but it also allows us to have an additional space that we use both as a cafeteria during the day and we use for a wide range of programs, for talks, film screening, sound events, performances. Oscar Niemeyer in 2003.

This is the MVRDV proposal in 2004 which remains unrealized. You can see why. We tried really hard but some things are meant for the virtual reality. Alvaro Siza and Eduardo Souto de Moura with Cecil Balmond in 2005. And this year, we've -- on Sunday, we took down the Rem Koolhaas and Cecil Balmond pavilion. It was very important that Rem Koolhaas did not want to build a piece of architecture that was just a kind of a model on the lawn. What he felt was important was that he wanted to create a place, a place for public programming, a place and an active space where ideas would be created, debated and reinvented throughout the period of three months that the pavilion was there and this started with a 24-hour event which he worked very closely with our co-director of exhibitions and programs and director of international projects, Hans Ulrich Obrist to devise these programs.

And the first was a 24-hour interview marathon. We invited 68 speakers who were invited because it was felt that they represented very unique aspects of London, and we invited philosophers, writers, musicians, architects, artists, historians, fashion designers and they each were in conversation with Rem Koolhaas and Hans Ulrich for a period of about 20 minutes and then this was changed and it went on all through the night and what was actually created was this incredible critical mass, as you can see here. It became like a festival site and people slept outside and stayed for the whole 24 hours.

This kicked off the momentum for the summer which then was followed by talks and panels that happened every single Friday night throughout the summer, as well as a range of different events during the week which were less problematic. We also screened films in the pavilion and commissioned performance work.

This is a performance by an art school, Lally Cechwin, who recreated a performance based on a text by Rem Koolhaas in the '70s. I think that leads us quite neatly into the public programs and educational space of what we do. We work directly with 35,000 people through the education program and the audiences for those events add another 40,000 so again, that's a very significant strand of our program. We -- I'm not going to talk you through every aspect

because I think it would be too laborious but we provide -- we remove barriers for all audiences to their engagement with art, architect program and our exhibitions program and we do that in a range of ways, through talks, conferences, workshops. We do outreach programs where we actually go out and try to coach those people who think that visiting galleries is something they might want to do.

When appropriate, we work with artists off site and more importantly, we work through partnerships and collaborations. One of the most interesting partnerships that we've been working in over the last three to four years is Exhibition Road. Exhibition Road is the area of London -- it's an unique area in London which is home to the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Science Museum, National History museum, the Goethe Institute, all of the royal colleges, imperial colleges which is the center for medical and scientific research. We've all come together as a conglomerate of organizations, there are 21 of us, and we are working together to make Exhibition Road the destination for education and culture in London.

And we started it this summer by -- this was a project led by the Serpentine where we commissioned artists collective Moti Roti, to work with 13 of those organizations and various community groups and members of the public to create work which ruptured the facade of those of the architecture of those buildings by presenting notions of what they found to be valuable to them rather than focusing on the collective expertise within those museums and trying to bring something very contemporary and redefining of what is of value in that cultural area.

This was done by a series of very large scale projections on the architectural facades up and down Exhibition Road. We also commissioned artists through our education strand to make work, in settings outside of the context of the gallery. This is important not only in terms of those communities having an opportunity to engage with contemporary art but also redefining spaces in which contemporary art can take place and also notions of who is involved in the production of both cultural spaces and work itself.

This is work by an artist called Faisal Abdu'Allah who worked alongside students from the soon to close secondary school which is being replaced by a new building program in the UK where all of secondary schools are being replaced.

And we also invited Christian Boltanski who photographed 14 years ago every student, 144 of them, in a single year's intake in that school and we are looking for them now. This work will be completed when we've actually found them all. We've found about 40 of them today and it's a long-time project which will stand as a memorial and monument to the changing demographic and culture of that school as well. To date, we found, I think, two of the students are actually no longer alive. A number of them are in prison. Some of them have had incredible success stories and in a way, it serves as a metaphor for any cultural group. This could happen pretty much anywhere in the world and you'd be able to see patterns.

We worked with legendary architect Yona Friedman to recreate the architecture of the school over a period of a month. And worked with artist and film-maker Runa Islam to create a new work which was recently -- which actually closed on Sunday at the Serpentine and was presented in the gallery.

It's important to look at and work, break down those kind of audiences that engage with contemporary art and the Serpentine feels that it's crucial that we use -- use the opportunities we have as a cultural institution to look at the role and function of our contemporary culture, not as social policy but also as a place where ideas can be debated and where culture is created rather than just simply presented.

Which brings me to our expanded program. This is Battersea Power Station, which is one of London's most iconic buildings.

Charmingly, it was built in 1934 which is the same year as the Serpentine Gallery so we feel a natural kind of link to this space. In thinking about ways in which we can move forward building on our past, one of the things is that rather than expanding our footprint or expanding through building, what we want to do is work in international partnerships and also to expand problematically

so to look at our cultural capital and our expertise and think about how that can be a way that we can extend the reach of the institution rather than always demanding that people can straightforwardly to us but to think about how we can move ourselves into new situations, work through partnerships towards an engagement with new audiences and really in some ways, avoid the rigidity and possible restrictions of expanding through building because by the time you may have worked through planning and got ourselves a new structure, actually it might well be that we may have moved on intelligently or might not be the right place for us to be at any given time.

So the opportunity came -- this is our co-director, department of programs, Julia Peyton-Jones who apologizes that she's not here today and Hans Obrist, and as well as redefining our programs and expanding our program by working in spaces off site. We are also redefining the kind of structures of institutions by having a co-directorship which I think is really important so that rather than a single person directing the organization, it seems to be important that we have a double-headed directorship which allows us to reinvent that role but also doubles the reach of what we are able to do.

So the Battersea Power Station became available. It's a 36-acre site which is enormous and it currently is in a site of incredible dereliction. It's about to be redeveloped by Parkview International who loaned us the space and we presented work by 52 Chinese artists in this site. As you know, Hans Obrist, as many of you know, I'm sure, has undertaken a lot of research in Asia and wanted to bring that to UK audiences. It was also seen important that we presented work, nearly all of the work was made since 2002 so presenting new work to audiences in the UK.

The site itself, we didn't attempt to do anything except put art into it and I think it lends itself very much like kind of a biennale site to lands base work so a lot of the work we presented in this space was video and performance and some installation.

So the question for us is how can museums and galleries reinvent themselves to be both relevant and progressive in the face of such

kind of cultural contradictions and how can we take advantage of the opportunities of working in partnerships internationally where new technologies allows us to work within collapsed geographies where it's -- it's very, very possible now for us to think about ways in which through collaboration, not only can we be more ambitious about the exhibitions that we are able to present and the ways in which we are able to work with artists but also we can expand our pool of knowledge enormously so that we can work alongside curators in other regions and be able to work very, very quickly in a way that means we don't have to suddenly reinvent ourselves as experts elsewhere but actually we can bring in expertise and work very closely alongside others.

So the China Power Station, one exhibition which is Battersea, is not a single exhibition, it's an exhibition over a number of years. It will be next year going to Oslo, to the Austria Art Museum, then Beijing in 2008 and then it will return to London as a kind of developing exhibition over those years, probably 2012 for the Olympics.

I think that's all I want to say.