Olga Fernández López, Exposiciones y comisariado: relatos cruzados

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Olga Fernández López, *Exposiciones y comisariado: relatos cruzados*

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- 1 There is a particular kind of trepidation we feel on first encountering a book that we have been waiting for, one that has to do as much with anticipatory excitement as the fear of disappointment. Olga Fernández López's book *Exposiciones y comisariado: relatos cruzados* was such a book for me, a solid primer on exhibition histories that could be used in teaching what continues to be a relatively new area of studies with few secondary sources and scattered materials. I hasten to add that the book was far from a disappointment, that anyone teaching or learning the history of exhibition-making should rush to read it and that those in a position to acquire translation rights should do so straightaway. The fundamental premise of the book is disarmingly simple, instead of writing about exhibitions as self-contained entities, a gesture that has become a startlingly consistent choice in the field so far, Fernández López sets out to construct in each one of her chapters a series of six narratives that thematically interweave different shows¹. This, in itself, provides a valuable methodological object lesson that demonstrates how much remains to be written about, around and between exhibitions. Through these narratives she is able not only to provide an impressively well-informed history of the exhibition form but to situate within it a genealogy of the contemporary curator that foregrounds influence and interdependence over individual authorship. Each one of the chapters is self-sufficient, but helpful cross-references both to other chapters and to the numerous illustrations are given throughout, something that underlies the pedagogical intent of the volume. This pedagogical intent is significant in as much as the history the book constructs subtly but rightly corrects some of the most glaring omissions of the coffee-table anthologies². In this way, for example, the book pays due attention to the history of trade exhibition, propaganda shows, shop windows and commercial environments that so directly shaped the display of art in the twentieth century, a history that is relatively well documented but often neglected in exhibition histories written in a narrowly art-historical mode. Likewise, while the history she constructs remains largely Western centric, her expertise in Latin American exhibitions is here put to good use and her examples go beyond the tired set

of exhibitions that have quickly solidified into a canon of sorts. However, it is also perhaps to that pedagogical intent that we can assign a certain timidity in the book. One gets the sense that there is another book waiting to be written that mobilises the author's impressive historical knowledge to furnish arguments that are only hinted at here, a book where her duty to delimit the field of exhibition studies for her readers does not preclude her from simultaneously intervening in it in more decisive ways. All in all, however, this is a book that was urgently needed, and that is a rare achievement in itself.

NOTES

1. This is somewhat justifiable given the often-arduous task of gathering documentation for a single show, something for which the work of the Afterall Exhibition Histories series is to be thanked, but the tendency has also been fuelled by the proliferation of texts written by curators on their own shows, see for example, Paula Marincola (ed.), *Site Read: Seven Curators on their Landmark Exhibitions* (Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2019).
2. See, for example, Altshuler, Bruce. *Exhibitions that Made Art History vols. 1 and 2* (London: Phaidon Press, 2008 and 2013) and Hoffmann, Jens. *Show Time* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2014).