ALMINE RECH

MAMCO, From Memory

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The collection

A museum's collection is one of its defining elements: it is often the source of exhibitions which, in an ideal world, will in turn enrich the collection—if not by adding to it, then at least by deepening our understanding of it. The problem, however, is that most museum collections are based on outdated models of representation. One should remember that every collection starts out life not as an assortment of objects amassed by circumstance, reflecting an organization's tastes and resources at a given point in time, but rather as the sum of past choices and encounters. Not as something to adorn a city or country's trophy cabinet, but rather as a collection of narratives that transcend borders. And not as a mere list of names and works from different genres, but rather as the end product of a process of growth and expansion.

MAMCO, From Memory

The exhibition 'MAMCO, From Memory' is based on a participatory exercise, as a thousand members of the public voted for their favorite items from the collection, and the chosen works— around 300 in total—will go on display throughout the museum this fall. This exhibition can thus be viewed as a collective portrait of the museum based on public sentiment: voters were asked to choose one piece—associated perhaps with a memory, a sense of attachment, or a discovery—that, in their view, captures one aspect of MAMCO's identity.

Renovation

'MAMCO, From Memory' also marks a new chapter in the museum's history: it takes place in our 30th anniversary year and will be the last exhibition held at the museum's historic premises before the building closes for renovation. During the closure, which will last for several years, the museum will run a modified program of off-site events. It will then return to its home, a former machine tool and measuring instrument factory, after it has been restructured as a public venue, renovated to international museum standards and fitted with equipment that has long been sorely lacking. So the exhibition can also be viewed as a tribute to those who dreamed up, set up, and built up the museum and its collection over the past three decades, bearing in mind that MAMCO owes its very existence to grassroots efforts to establish a home for contemporary art in Geneva.

Collections as public goods

Last but not least, the exhibition and the museum's coming transformation will serve as an opportunity to reflect on the collection in the years ahead—to think about its strengths and shortcomings, and to consider how we might expand it and in which direction. It is our sincere hope that this process will fundamentally alter how we think about artistic heritage, both locally and globally. Let's consider setting up collections as public goods rather than trophies that determine a museum's importance; connecting public collections across Switzerland; and, just perhaps, opening the door to genuine cooperation and collaboration between the institutions that hold them. Is it really necessary, for instance, to have multiple museums acquiring works by the same artists? Or is it reasonable to consider that just one institution—one node in this network—should hold a substantial body of works representing a particular artist or movement? Might it be feasible for museums to pool and share resources across local or even national borders? Could we design a system whereby, in the future, large collections are held centrally and made available to all Swiss museums rather than by individual institutions? These are just some of the questions we look forward to discussing with our colleagues in the years ahead. While we expect these proposals to gain support in some quarters, we also know that they are likely to spark lively debate. And in our line of work, that can only be a good thing.