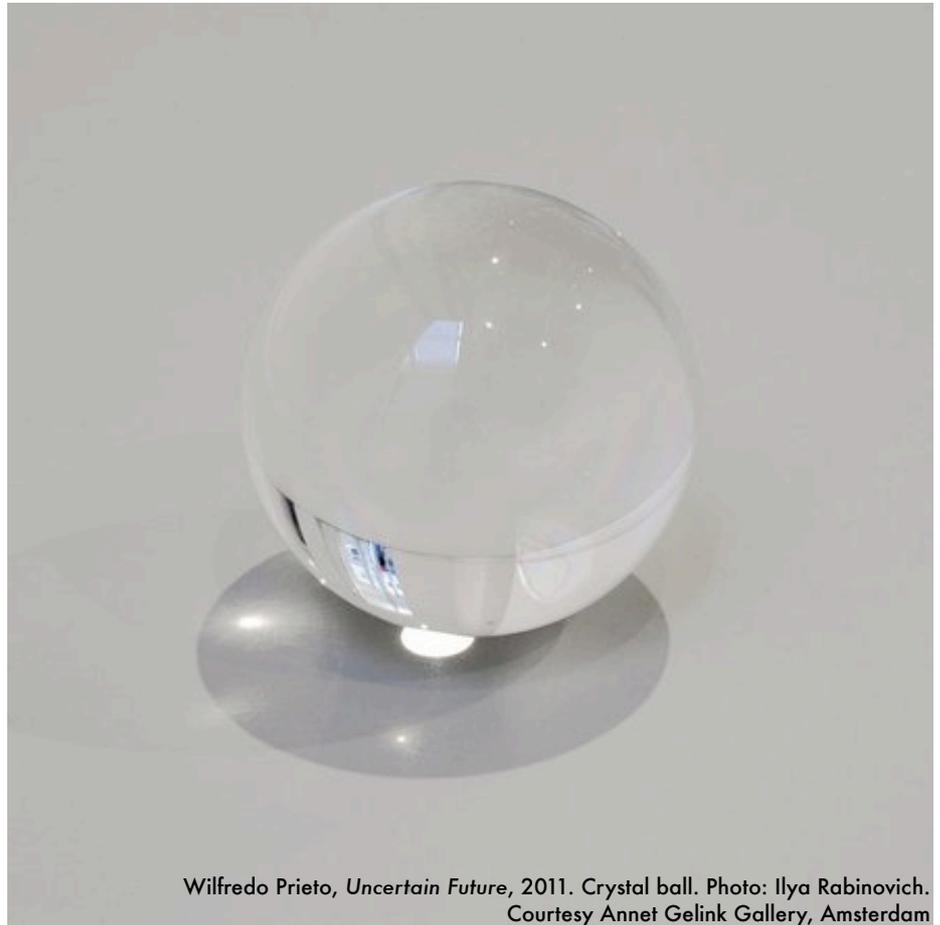


Call of the Mall concept



Wilfredo Prieto, *Uncertain Future*, 2011. Crystal ball. Photo: Ilya Rabinovich.
Courtesy Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam

Call of the Mall: art manifestation in and around Hoog Catharijne 2013

Introduction

Utrecht's 'modern' mall Hoog Catharijne will be forty years old in 2013. When it opened it was Europe's largest covered shopping centre, but it was also an office complex and included apartment-buildings, all of this built around the Netherlands' busiest transport hub, with busses, trains and trams.

Its exceptional design – the interior boasted marble, palm trees, aviaries, a bronze fountain and art for example, there was a space for recreation in the small theatre and various roof gardens at the top – made a visit to Hoog Catharijne a real experience. Times have

changed however. The complex is currently undergoing drastic remodelling, in preparation for future developments. But what will that future look like?

Changing world

Sometimes it can seem as if nothing is self-evident any more, everything is subject to change. Our world has never developed as rapidly as it has in recent years it seems. Politicians veer from Right to Left and populism is back in the political arena. We are mutually connected in ways that were previously unimaginable, via email, mobile phone, social networks, chat-apps,

and yet we have become more distanced from one another. The financial crisis, the European entanglement in the crisis, the concerns over the fall of the Euro, the end of capitalism as we know it; no one can actually explain the situation any more, or how it was allowed to reach this state. Old Europe groans and moans under an economic policy that no longer serves the people, but which sets the pace. Meanwhile, new superpowers are embracing the liberal capitalism of the 21st century and surpassing Europe in terms of power and wealth.

Kunst in het Stationsgebied

Call of the Mall is organized by Stichting Kunst in het Stationsgebied in collaboration with the city of Utrecht. Utrecht is working on the future of the city in the Stationsgebied. Art in public spaces can make an essential contribution to the character and identity of the area, hence the ambition of the municipality of Utrecht and the Stichting Kunst in het Stationsgebied to realise visually dominant works of art. A programme of temporary art installations, performances, film evenings, audio and video works and exploratory expeditions precedes these permanent works of art. *Call of the Mall* is the first large-scale manifestation taking place in this context.

Globalization, digitalization, economic crisis, new Right; these are all aspects of a new world that are now becoming apparent. And this is an extremely complex world in which we are still seeking, as the rules of the game are not yet clear and we don't always know where to position ourselves vis-à-vis the rapid changes. Do these changes form a threat or do they offer chances?

Hoog Catharijne is actually a mini-world in itself, where all the sweeping changes in the 'outside world' occur on a smaller scale. The shifts that dominate the news manifest themselves in a place like Hoog Catharijne where we can examine the physical, financial and sociological aspects of our changing society. The mini-world of Hoog Catharijne is thus the perfect case study for this project. It is a sort of pressure cooker and simultaneously a time capsule, where old ideals and new developments meet.

Commerce

In contrast to the ceremonial function of the mall as described in the text box, Hoog Catharijne is known particularly as a commercial space, as a shopping mall. It is, therefore, interesting to consider the meaning of the English word 'commerce'. In his words, 'commerce-by-artists is shorthand for the many ways that artists mediate between themselves, things and other people. Their use of new formats and frames creates new forms of commerce, new configurations that have transformed the nature of the work of art, the function of the gallery or museum, the role of the viewer, and therefore the quality of aesthetic experience.'

'Commerce', in the sense of interaction and exchange (and the accompanying dynamics), manifests

itself in many different ways in Hoog Catharijne. There is the commercial trading: the transaction of goods and services that takes place in the shops and many offices of the complex. There is the literal movement of people, the stream of passers-by, travellers walking from the station to the city centre, the cars that (now still) drive under the complex and the public transport hub with busses, trams and trains. And people come to meet each other, exchange ideas or to work in the various meeting places (restaurant, conference rooms, Seats2meet, coffee corner at the meditation centre).

In other words Hoog Catharijne has many different users and cultures: retailers, travellers, residents, flexiworkers, teenagers, shoppers etc. Together they constitute Hoog Catharijne and each has their own culture of commerce, their own culture of interaction and reciprocity.

In the semi-public space of Hoog Catharijne we will test existing forms of commerce and create new, alternative forms of commerce. There is a need for new forms of trade, a revaluation of the mutual relationships, with more attention paid to our environment, whereby the economy is again linked to social justice, with an eye towards the common good, such as our shared public space.

Shopping

A shopping centre is surely one of the most acute places to examine our current economy and its flaws. These are the palaces of our consumerist desires, the temples at which we worship the economy through our consumption.

And yet this model, that of the shopping mall, is on the wane. Not just because the recession tempers our desire to buy, but also because we increasingly shop online, prefer

Mall

The English word 'mall' describes a pedestrian area, whether covered or not. 'The Mall' in London originated in the late 19th, early 20th century, after similar examples of pedestrian roads in Paris, Washington and Berlin. In Washington and London they are used to indicate centres of power. They are spaces with a ceremonial function. In London the British people watch the wedding and funeral processions of the royal family on The Mall. Recently Queen Elizabeth II treated 250,000 people to a spectacular concert in honour of her Diamond Jubilee. In America, it is the place where Martin Luther King gave his famous 'I have a dream' speech.

Commerce

In the broader meaning of the word 'commerce', transaction and (social) interaction are central notions, whereby money and the increase thereof is not the point of departure, but merely one of the ways to give form to the exchange. An exchange without money can still be a form of 'commerce', just not a commercial form.

'Commerce' can be said to occur when something (a person or object) changes something else. After the 'negotiation' you yourself have changed, but so has the other. That might be because your opinion, the way you look, or your location has changed, or the value or ownership of something has changed, but there is always a transaction, a flow, a movement and a reciprocal relationship. It is the interaction that creates added value, be it material or immaterial.

Thus, commerce is not purely economic but indeed also social.

not to be driven through hallways with identical shops like a herd of animals or simply because there are better, more pleasant ways to shop.

The shopping centre was once the height of progress, now the buildings and the concept behind them are often the architectural evidence of what we have come to regard as outmoded ideas of progress. We still go there mainly for convenience, everything is in one place, you stay dry and parking is often easier there than in the city centre. But many people prefer to shop in small streets, with specialized shops where you are not treated as a mass-consumer but as an individual. Others prefer to shop online, in between times, or in the evening from the comfort of their sofa. This changing consumer behaviour stems in part from the fact that the culture of shopping has taken on an increasingly important role in our lives.

The Department Store

Modern shopping – as we still know it – took shape in the 19th century: with the emergence of the technological capabilities that enabled mass production (which pushed down prices and made previously luxury goods available to a larger public); with a worldwide trading network that allowed for import and export on a previously unprecedented scale; with the arrival of the department store, where the principle of *entree libre* meant that everyone could now gaze at exotic products, such as lemons, lions, lace and silk.

Furthermore, the department store did something that required a lot of courage back then (and which thus also met with resistance): they placed fixed prices next to products (negotiation was no longer possible and the customer, and particularly the

competition, always knew how low you were prepared to go with your prices), they allowed customers (mainly women who had found in the department store their 'public' space in which to parade) to buy on credit and return products (even when the china had already been used to impress guests).

Small, specialized shops where the maker was also often the shop assistant, which had previously dominated the market, gradually disappeared from the street scene. They couldn't deal with the competition; their hand-made products were frequently much more expensive than the large-scale, partly mechanically made products of the Industrial Revolution. Standardized production processes and efficiency allowed for more and cheaper products.

Moreover, shopping had to become an experience, which the small shops were unable to offer at that time, sojourning started to play an increasingly important role in consumer culture. We don't shop out of necessity only, but mainly also for the sake of it, for the fun of shopping. The foundation for this consumerist culture, was laid in the 19th Century.

The 19th century department store, symbol of high class, service and quality, gradually made way for shopping centres in the 20th century, large bulk stores where you went not for the service, but for the low prices. Many, more, cheap, quick and bad architecture have come to replace what once seemed like a true palace. The department store had chandeliers, enclosed gardens and places to rest. The shopping centre has fluorescent lighting, long queues at the checkout and often badly informed staff.

Fordism/Post-Fordism

The 19th century department store could only emerge thanks to so-called Fordism. Named after the car manufacturer Ford, Fordism stands for a standardised production system, for standard products that roll off the conveyor belt, for mass production facilitated by specialised machines, for unskilled but well-paid work and workers who could also afford to buy these products themselves. Mass production was made possible by these workers, who earned enough money to be consumers themselves and who, in fact, symbolize the crucial shift in the relationship between work and consumption on which capitalism is based.

The term Post-Fordism is used to characterize our current labour situation and economy. It stands for a service and knowledge economy, for information technology, the outsourcing of labour to low-wage countries, globalization and consumerism. These days we produce fewer products in the West, but more services.

Both models or systems require different skills from those who wish to 'participate'. Thus, Post-Fordism is availed by adaptability, flexibility, sensitivity and communication. The 'workers' in our time are the freelancers, the flexiworkers who are always working, who can do anything, never say no and are versatile.

In this Post-Fordist age, we see not only the emergence of new forms of work, but also of commerce. The shopping system of stone and concrete, rooted in what we now perceive of as inhospitable buildings that close their doors at night, was well-suited to the Fordist worker (weekend free, weekend shopping), but certainly not to the Post-Fordist freelancer, who wants to be able to order a jacket in the

evening, which he needs for an important meeting two days later. Glued to their laptops, today's workers might have time to enjoy a quick spot of online shopping in between times, but not to visit a shopping centre or the busy city centre.

You could say that the current 'old fashioned' or traditional shopping centres lack the characteristics of Post-Fordism: adaptability, flexibility, sensitivity and communication. They are unwieldy, inflexible, brusque and blaring in their communication.

People and concrete

The tension that Hoog Catharijne embodies is the tension between a physical space – an architectural structure that combines shopping centre, station, apartments and offices – and the services that take place there, the symbolism of the used space and the cultures of commerce.

Concrete and people do meet, but they don't always fit together. The world is changing but the buildings are lagging behind. Although the physical structure still functions according to the Fordist logic of the previous century, the interior is starting to change, more in keeping with a Post-Fordist 21st century. The best example of this may perhaps be the flexiwork spaces that are so popular in Hoog Catharijne (Seats2Meet for example).

The Fordism of concrete meets the Post-Fordism of people, their style of working, the changes in the areas of production and consumption. How is that encounter going and, above all, what is it not going well? How can art reflect upon and contribute to this?

Art

During the event in 2013, together with artists and through the lens of

art, we examine existing and new forms of commerce in the mini-world that is Hoog Catharijne. We test these forms in an environment where the tension between physical space and symbolic 'inner space', between building and usage, is tangible. The building facilitates certain cultures of commerce that might be in keeping with the period in which the complex was built, but which are now at odds with the current cultures of commerce, of the people who live, work, shop or travel there.

We work with artists because, and this is a crucial point, they are not in the service of a particular system. They operate from an autonomous position and due to that position and 'non-servitude' they are able to open new horizons and broaden our understanding of reality. Art shows us the world as we haven't seen it before, confronts us with possibilities and asks questions without expecting an answer. Works of art are a kind of transmitters that stimulate interaction and bring about commerce.

This power of art can not only stimulate discussion, break open a subject, but also, for want of a better word, create community spirit. Art does this in a very individual way, by speaking to people as individuals. This is in contrast to the mass communication that characterizes the current retail industry. Oddly enough this mass communication does not lead to an increased feeling of camaraderie. We are addressed as a mass but still no longer feel connected to one another. Art addresses everyone as an individual and those who find one another around that work are more strongly united than ever before.

The power of art also lies in the ability to create cultures of commerce, circles of interaction,

Winkel van Sinkel

The Winkel van Sinkel was the first department store in Utrecht. The building is still standing but the department store is gone. The name Winkel van Sinkel, however, has become a household term for a shop that sells a variety of products. The facade is still adorned with cast-iron symbols of commerce, caution, shipping and hope.



Vrede van Utrecht

In 2013 Utrecht celebrates the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht 300 years ago. This treaty of 1713 signified the end of a long series of international wars and religious disputes. It heralded a new balance of power in Europe, which for the first time came about through diplomacy instead of war with a large role for art and culture.

The envoys of the different countries negotiated for a full eighteen months in Utrecht, on an agreement behind which everyone could rally. This lengthy, fragile process was accompanied by an extensive cultural programme with which the emotions were massaged and the mind ripened for peace.

The shifts towards which the Treaty of Utrecht contributed but for which it also had to provide an answer, were also seeking a metaphorical compass in art and culture.

Kunst en markt

The art market has its very own economy, which is difficult to fathom and hard to understand for outsiders.

It not only fluctuates with the larger economy and the stock markets, sometimes there is actually an upturn in the art market while the rest of the economy is depressed, because art is seen as a safe option for capital investment. The controversial and intangible hedge funds also deal in art.

Some artists examine these economic mechanisms or play with them (for instance Damien Hirst who is very tactical in how he plays the market). But also gallery owners and collectors handle art as though it is a stock market product. This can make or break artists.

It is interesting to work with artists in a commercial environment such as Hoog Catharijne because they know the whims of the market all too well. Moreover, artists are good at enticing visitors (intellectual, aggressive, poetic, suggestive) and for this they sometimes employ the same mechanisms as those of the advertising world.

reciprocation, flow, that cross other circles. Art does not ask people their reason for being there or their function in the space and can, therefore, bring together unexpected constellations of people.

Following on from this, it is good to emphasize that through their work, artists are supremely capable of finding new values and new forms with which we can relate to one another. They can radically overturn familiar values and relationships, sometimes by means of grand gestures, sometimes in subtle forms, but always on the basis of reciprocity.

Because to experience a work of art requires an active deed, whereby the work must entice and move you and you must be open to that. When that occurs, one can speak of real contact, an exchange, transformation, commerce, an aesthetic experience in which you think about the value of the work: what do you see and do you like it? And at the same time you ask yourself what the work wants to say to you, what it says about you and your role as a consumer, a passer-by here and in the world.

In Hoog Catharijne we are far removed from the safe environment of the white cube, reality screams at you from all directions. Without tampering with the autonomy of the arts, we relate to urgent and topical developments in a context that embodies these developments.