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Article

Palm Tree Whispers and Mountain Escapes: How Contemporary Artworks Contribute to an Inclusive Public Sphere

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Abstract

How do artworks contribute to a more inclusive public sphere? Artworks contribute to the inclusiveness of a public sphere in that they help us consider previous objects as acting subjects, and thus as entities deserving membership in the public sphere. In addition, artworks typically attract a public, thus generating the necessary recognition for additional subjects. We propose a typology that categorizes artworks' contribution to an inclusive public sphere. The typology is based on two axes: (a) artworks' explicitness in attributing the status of a subject to a previous object and (b) the number of people that get to see the artwork. In order to illustrate the applicability of the typology and in order to understand how the two dimensions relate to one another, we analyze how two artworks include the non-human as subjects into the public sphere: Eduardo Navarro's *Sound Mirror* (shown at the 2016 São Paulo Biennial) and Prabhakar Pachpute's *Mountain Escape* (exhibited in the 2016 Colombian Salón Nacional de Artistas). Comparing both artistic strategies we find that there may be a trade-off between the explicitness and the reach of a new subjectification.

Keywords

art; art world; contemporary art; distribution of the sensible; Eduardo Navarro; environmental art; global art market; Jacques Rancière; Latin American art; inclusiveness; Oliver Marchart; political art; Prabhakar Pachpute; public sphere

Issue

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1. Introduction

Artworks' effects on individuals and communities are difficult to analyze because artworks' messages are ambiguous and their impact is hard to trace and measure. Sensory, or aesthetic impressions, are not unequivocal in their meaning. In contrast to cognitive statements, much is left to the interpretation of onlookers. As Edelman (1995, p. 7) holds:

The political meanings of works of art, then, are never given, but always "taken" by political leaders and followers....All possibilities cannot be grasped, so we search for a model that resolves ambiguities and reduces possibilities to one or a few.

Yet, communities tend to converge on a certain understanding of what counts as beautiful, or artistic. Artworks undoubtedly shape how we perceive our world. Reconciling the ambiguity of sensory impressions with the convergence of their evaluation in communities has thus posed a puzzle, addressed in a rich theoretical literature.

A first, positivist approach has assumed that certain kinds of aesthetic impressions always invoke certain feelings, similar to natural laws. British philosopher Edmund Burke distinguished beauty and the sublime as the strongest impressions anything could have on individuals (Burke, 1757/1990). Whereas the sublime originates from impressions that seem boundless and, in a way, threatening, beauty is purely charming and attractive (Vandenabeele, 2003). In his analysis he tried to deduce

the regularities according to which visual impressions, sounds, tastes, smells, and experience of touch invoke such a sense of “beauty” or “sublime.” More recent contributions making use of this distinction have analyzed political events, such as the 9/11 terrorist attack through the lens of the sublime (Roberts, 2014).

A second approach holds that the converging evaluation of sensory impressions in communities lies in the fact that we judge artworks in a community (Arendt, 1982; Kant, 1790/1920). When we judge a sensory impression, we take into account what our peers may think about it and adapt our evaluations (Arendt, 1982, pp. 54, 73; Beiner, 1982, p. 133). Through this collective evaluation of art, individuals determine together what deserves to be recognized as beautiful or relevant. Arendt even goes as far as to argue that we determine who gets to belong to our community through such collective judgment (Arendt, 1982, p. 72; Beiner, 1982, p. 113). Drawing on Arendt, Corcoran (2008) holds that visual recognition relates to political recognition, or put differently: What looks good, beautiful, and right relates to one another. Following Corcoran (2008, p. 78), “aesthetic judgment is recognitive: it distinguishes between seeing and not seeing, viewing but refusing to recognize as rightful or belonging.” Similarly, Ferguson (1999) holds that aesthetic judgments are political because they involve the contestation between individuals and groups over ways the world is understood.

Despite this rich theoretical literature, it remains difficult to evaluate artworks’ impact on individuals and communities (Coemans et al., 2015). The theories remain highly abstract and are difficult to apply to individual artworks. Our contribution aims at breaking down two more recent theoretical contributions, in an effort to provide a simple typology to evaluate artworks’ political potential. Drawing on Rancière (1992, 1995/2003, 2004, 2009, 2014) and Marchart (2019), we argue that two issues are key in understanding how art has an impact on communities. First, an artwork’s meaning needs to be understood by an individual; second, the artwork needs to reach more than just a few people. We propose a typology that categorizes artworks’ political potential based on (a) how explicitly they relate a message to their viewers and (b) how many people get to see the artwork. This typology allows researchers to categorize artworks with respect to their political potential, such as their contribution to an inclusive public sphere.

In a second step, we conduct a comparative case study and analyze how two artworks contribute to a political change through their aesthetic proposition (George & Bennett, 2004, p. 75). We trace how exactly they achieve this influence by comparing them along the two axes developed in the typology: explicitness of their message and size of the audience they address. Our comparison focuses on two artworks dealing with the non-human. Most societies do not currently recognize non-humans as equals in their societies. Comparing artistic strategies that aim at instituting the non-human as a

subject along the axes of the typology allows understanding what aspects of the artworks increase or decrease their impact on the public sphere.

The comparison also sheds light on how the two dimensions of our typology relate to one another—i.e., does a more explicit artwork more easily reach a wide audience? The comparison of the two artworks suggests that less explicit artworks more easily reach a wider audience. Hence, artworks that achieve international acclaim “hurt” less. This leads us to the insight that the potential of artworks to increase the inclusiveness of a public sphere is limited by a trade-off: They either explicitly propose (political and societal) change or reach a wide(r) audience.

We proceed in four steps: After developing the theoretical argument and the typology, we describe the artworks and their exhibition contexts. Next, we compare the selected works in two dimensions: how explicitly they create new subjects and how they form a public that accepts these subjects. The last section offers some concluding thoughts.

2. How Do Artworks Make the Public Sphere More Inclusive?

In the following, we theorize how artworks reach a political potential in general, and how they may contribute to an inclusive public sphere in particular. We first line out how artworks help us to recognize new subjects that were previously only accorded the status of objects, drawing on Rancière’s concept of the sensible. Second, we argue that not all artworks are equally apt to make the public sphere more inclusive, drawing on Marchart’s critique of Rancière. We develop a typology that allows categorizing artworks based on the two axes explicitness of the proposed subjectification and the size of the public that sees the artwork.

2.1. *Creating Additional Subjects: How Artworks Make Public Sphere More Inclusive*

The relation between art and the inclusiveness of a public sphere lies in artworks’ capacity to institute additional subjects. The degree of inclusiveness of a public sphere depends on its capacity to recognize entities as subjects that previously did not enjoy this status (Benhabib, 1992; Eley, 1992; Fraser, 1990). Recognizing additional subjects, each demanding adequate treatment, makes a public sphere inclusive.

How do artworks contribute to institute new subjects, and accordingly, to an inclusive public sphere? Rancière’s concept of the distribution of the sensible proves helpful in answering this question. By sensible, Rancière means an order that is both perceptible (physical) and reasonable (socially accepted). The social order and the physical order are thus related in Rancière’s thinking, and it is not possible to change one without the other. The question of what looks “good, beautiful,

right” is not only a question of personal taste, but has normative implications that also shape political thinking (Corcoran, 2008). Rancière attributes to the distribution of the sensible similar functions as are usually ascribed to the public sphere. The distribution of the sensible—the socially accepted structure of physical space—delimits both the common and the private realms of society, and determines each individual’s position in the public sphere (Rancière, 2004, p. 12). This distribution defines who has access to the common domain, how, and when (Rancière, 2004, p. 12). Rancière thus suggests that the structure of physical space also has normative implications. The distribution of physical things can as such be experienced and at the same time constitutes a normative order. This is because the range of our experiences also affects what we think of as just, or right: i.e., in a world where animals are treated as a resource, it is hard to think of animals having equal rights as human beings. The distribution of experiences therefore determines what is socially accepted and normatively valid. Rancière defines the distribution of the sensible as the form of physical things, and the ethical order as an aesthetic one.

In Rancière’s distribution of the sensible, the marginalized gain access through manifestation of their physical presence as equal to those that already take a part in the distribution of the sensible. Those who are excluded from perception are also excluded from the societal order in a normative sense—they should not participate. They become included and visible/audible when they manage to create statements or actions in space that are understood as emanating from equal subjects. These actions do not match their excluded status and hence expose an inconsistency in the normative order (Rancière, 1995/2003, p. 45). Rancière cites the example of Jeanne Deroin, who ran for office in the French national legislative elections in 1849. As she did everything needed to be elected, Deroin’s non-admission highlights the contradiction between the official rules (at the time, women were prohibited from running for office) and the fact that women are capable of performing all the necessary actions. Thus, subjects are capable of making statements that undeniably emanate from an equal (Rancière, 1995/2003, p. 45).

The interesting feature of Rancière’s approach is that the process through which marginalized groups and individuals become regarded as equal political subjects does not rely on formal political processes, but instead on sensitive or aesthetic experiences. In contrast to other thinkers, Rancière understands politics as the processes by which the previously excluded claim access to society’s relevant spheres by manifesting their equality with current participants in space. Political action, then, need not assume any specific form (e.g., demonstrating in the streets or voting). Rather, such action depends on the potential to confirm the equality of individuals previously not perceived as equal in relation to established groups (Rancière, 1995/2003, p. 44).

Artworks may constitute actions that create subjects, as they make visible and audible the previously unseen and unheard. They may as such state the equality of the excluded with those already present. Rancière’s idea of a physical order having normative implications assigns to artworks a normative potential to the extent that they restructure space:

Art is not, in the first instance, political because of the messages and sentiments it conveys concerning the state of the world. Neither is it political because of the manner in which it might choose to represent society’s structures, or social groups, their conflicts or identities. It is political because of the very distance it takes with respect to these functions, because of the type of space and time that it institutes, and the manner in which it frames the time and peoples this space. (Rancière, 2009, p. 23)

Artworks relate to the inclusiveness of public sphere because they propose new subjects. This resonates much with literature that has analyzed how art is central to a democratic public sphere in disclosing “in fresh and insightful ways the felt quality and lived experience of concerns that merit public attention” (Zuidervaart, 2011, p. 126).

2.2. Making the Subjectification Explicit and Expanding Recognition Across Different Publics

The problem with Rancière is that, following his account, any artwork has an impact on the social order, because art changes the material setup of our surroundings (Marchart, 2019, p. 13; Norval, 2014). Does any change in the environment, and thus any artwork entail a corresponding change in the social order? According to Oliver Marchart, this is not the case. In his reading, art only has a political effect if it fulfils three conditions: It must agitate, propagate, and organize (Marchart, 2019, p. 37). Agitation refers to the act of creating subjects. According to Marchart, individuals are made into subjects via a hegemonic order (Marchart, 2019, p. 37). Disrupting this hegemonic order enables creating new subjects. In order to disrupt a hegemonic order, subjects need to be agitated, that is, brought into an active state. This agitation presupposes a political situation that cannot be constructed, yet must be encountered: It is a window of opportunity of sorts, in which people reflect on the current conditions and become open to new ideas (Marchart, 2019, p. 38). Following the successful agitation of individuals, the worldview advocated by an artwork needs to be propagated. Thus, a particular political position needs to be accepted by many people, rather than merely by a few agitated ones (Marchart, 2019, p. 37). Third, this political position needs to be instituted in order to be sustainable: Debates and practices need to be organized such that they are available over time and do not disappear with the artwork (Marchart, 2019, p. 37).

Marchart, in contrast to Rancière, limits art's contribution to more inclusiveness to certain forms of artistic expression that take an explicit political stance. His definition of political art implies that very few artworks seem to be political and that the artwork itself has little impact. Even the first condition—agitation—is not achieved primarily by artistic intervention, but instead depends on a political situation that must be encountered. The condition that artworks need to propagate or organize imposes a particular form on artworks, namely that they be in the form of a political manifestation, or rally, and then organize in some collective. Marchart's examples include the Guerilla Girls, Femen, Public Movement, Reverend Billy and Stop the Shopping Choir, Gran Fury and Group Material (Marchart, 2019, p. 34). These are all collectives of artists, and their artistic practice consists of performance and activism. Restricting political art to these particular forms, Marchart limits the range of artistic expressions that can be political. Thus, whereas Rancière claims that any art is political, Marchart's definition of political art means that hardly any art is political.

We suggest combining Rancière's and Marchart's accounts. First, we need to modify Rancière's distribution of the sensible: Any artwork, in making the previously invisible visible, and unheard audible, creates new subjects and *potentially* has an impact on the public sphere. Following Marchart, we would agree that further conditions need to be satisfied for an artwork to contribute to an inclusive public sphere. We would posit that we need to ask whether and how a material change and the proposed subjectification (a) is understood by the public addressed (i.e., is the subjectification explicit enough to be understood) and (b) how the message of an artwork circulates beyond the small segment of society that usually attends art events. In contrast to Marchart, formulating conditions relating to the type of artworks, we shift the focus on the reception process.

The first dimension refers to how explicit the artwork is. Artworks are aesthetic experiences, with multiple, ambiguous meanings. Their message is therefore open to interpretation and discussion, which makes them difficult to understand. However, certain artworks are more explicit than others, in that they explicitly name the circumstances or situations they relate to. We would argue that an artwork's contribution to expanding the public sphere depends on its message being understood by many, not only a few people. Such understanding is easier achieved if a message is relatively explicit. In a way, this condition relates to Marchart's point that artworks need to agitate (i.e., disrupt the existing normative order). In contrast to Marchart, we do not think that agitation depends on political circumstances, or a window of opportunity, but that any kind of artwork can make an explicit statement.

The second dimension refers to the size of the public reached. Not all artworks enjoy the same degree of publicity and not all artworks are circulated to the same extent. This condition relates to Marchart's point that an

artwork needs to be propagated and instituted. However, in contrast to Marchart, we don't think that such a diffusion depends on the artworks' form (i.e., an artistic collective mobilizing and eventually building a permanent establishment). Rather, artworks usually reach some degree of institution, because they are exhibited in galleries and museums. The status of an artwork critically depends on the affirmation of an "art world" (Danto, 1964). The art world consists of a range of art institutions and art experts that need to approve of an artwork. Without the recognition by the art world, i.e., without being featured by an art critic, a curator, selected by an art committee, or being exhibited in a museum or a gallery, artworks remain artefacts. Thus, artworks, by being artworks, have already reached a larger part of society, compared to artefacts that are not considered art. Yet, artists and artworks differ in their status, depending on the organizations and networks they are circulated and exhibited in. Within the field of cultural production, how one relates to the others is central in gaining status (Aerne, 2020; Bourdieu, 1994; Bystryń, 1972; Currid, 2007; Danto, 1964). Artworks can thus be shown at one or multiple events, and address an international public, or a local one. Thus, while every artwork reaches some institutionalization, artworks differ with respect to the size of the audience they address.

These two dimensions capture how artworks contribute to an inclusive public sphere: An artwork with an explicit message and a wide audience is more likely to make the public sphere more inclusive than one with an implicit message catering to a small audience. Both conditions take up Marchart's criticism of Rancière's distribution of the sensible, namely, that not all artworks contribute to a change in the public sphere to the same extent. However, in contrast to Marchart, the capacity of an artwork to contribute to an inclusive public sphere is context-dependent: What an audience understands depends on time and place, just as whether and how the work circulates beyond a small segment of society.

Combining the two dimensions into a two-by-two matrix results in a typology (Table 1) that allows categorizing artworks' contribution to an inclusive public sphere.

3. Case Studies: Palm Tree Whispers and Mountain Escapes

This section presents two case studies on artworks instituting the non-human as subjects. The cases are selected based on the dependent variable (their impact on the public sphere) and serve two purposes (George & Bennett, 2004, p. 75). First, they trace how two artworks institute new subjects in the public sphere, based on the two axes theorized as relevant. They thus illustrate the applicability of the typology in structuring an analysis of artworks' impact on the public sphere. We choose artworks instituting the non-human as subjects, because we think that the recognition of the non-human as equal

Table 1. Artworks’ potential to contribute to an inclusive public sphere.

	Large audience	Small audience
Explicit message	Large potential	Intermediate potential
Implicit message	Intermediate potential	Small potential

to human beings in public sphere is still controversial in most societies. Analyzing artworks instituting the non-human as subjects is thus informative in order to understand under what conditions artworks are successful in enlarging the public sphere.

Second, the case studies serve to analyze how the two dimensions of the typology relate to one another. Do more explicit artworks reach a wide audience more easily? The artworks differ with respect to the two dimensions theorized to be relevant for their political impact on the inclusiveness of the public sphere. *Sound Mirror* is less explicit than *Mountain Escape* in its message. And while the São Paulo Biennial addresses an international and a local audience, the Colombian Salón Nacional de Artistas is predominantly a domestic art event. Tracing the reception of these artworks also helps understanding if explicitness and size of the audience are related, and if so, how.

3.1. Palm Tree Whispers: *Sound Mirror* at the São Paulo Biennial

Exhibited at the 2016 São Paulo Biennial, Eduardo Navarro’s installation *Sound Mirror* resembles a trumpet or trombone (see Figure 1). Navarro’s installation connects a palm tree and the exhibition visitors through an

instrument that transmits sound from the outside of the exhibition hall to the inside. Holding their ears to the tube, visitors realize that the tree’s leaves make sounds. This arrangement allows them to discover that the tree is not an object, but a living being just like themselves.

Navarro (b. 1979, Buenos Aires) placed a funnel measuring about two meters near the top of a palm tree. The trumpet narrows into a tube that perforates one of the glass walls of the exhibition hall. It connects the first floor of renowned architect Oscar Niemeyer’s exhibition hall of the São Paulo Biennial in Ibirapuera Park with a palm tree standing outside. It leans upward, making it easily accessible for a visitor sitting on a chair inside. The installation enabled exhibition visitors to hold an ear to the tube and listen to the tree leaves move. Presumably, the noise from the exhibition hall was also transmitted to the palm tree.

How we, as human beings, perceive our environment is central in Navarro’s work. In his installations, viewers perceive the inanimate environment with their senses. His works encompass various techniques, from sculptures to participatory installations and performance. Broadly speaking, Navarro explores our sensory perception of the environment. Another example of his work, *Polenphonia* (2018), involved flute players improvising in a garden. During the performance, the players wore



Figure 1. *Sound Mirror*.

masks that would enhance their sense of smell, their music thus reflecting the smells of their surroundings. Eduardo Navarro is internationally recognized and his artworks are exhibited all over the world (Art Basel, 2019).

3.2. *Mountain Escape* in the Colombian Salón Nacional de Artistas

The second artwork, *Mountain Escape* (see Figure 2) was painted directly onto the wall of Pereira's Art Museum (Colombia) as a contribution to the 2016 Salón Nacional de Artistas. In the background, the painting features a green mountain, whose yellow holes indicate where it has been exploited. The mountain base is borne by grayish human figures who are carrying the mountain above their heads—thus helping the mountain to escape from its plight. Their heads disappear behind the mountain, leaving the figures faceless. The small figures bearing the mountain might be interpreted as carrying it away, in an allusion to mining—that is, exploiting—the substance of the mountain. The figures also look crushed under the weight of the landmass towering above them, alluding to the hard, manual labor down the mines. In a symbiotic relationship, the small figures support and erode the mountain at the same time.

In the foreground, on a kind of platform, two human figures in jujitsu gear can be seen fighting, sitting atop another. Their heads are replaced by mining tools, a square funnel and a pick, which makes them seem less human. The platform and the humanoid upon it are also gray. Some airplanes and clouds, also gray, can be seen moving over the mountain. Although in the foreground,

the humanoids are not the first element of the painting to capture the viewer's attention. Instead, the mountain becomes the protagonist. Its vivid colors pale the shades of gray in which the human figures are painted. Moreover, the humanoids' facelessness relativizes their prominent position in the painting.

The environmental and social effects of coal-mining are a central theme in the artist's oeuvre. Prabhakar Pachpute (b. 1986) was born in Chandrapur (India), a city well-known for coal mining. Members of the artist's family worked down the local mines under highly precarious conditions. Mining and labor conditions are thus a frequent theme in Pachpute's work. He often draws in charcoal and directly onto walls. His works characteristically include surrealist elements—as exemplified by replacing human heads by mining tools (QAGOMA, 2018).

4. Comparison of Artistic Strategies: Subjects Beyond Exhibition Halls

In the following, we compare the two artworks along the two dimensions theorized to be important to contribute to an inclusive public sphere: how explicit the artworks are in their subjectification and how wide the audience is they address.

4.1. *Explicitness*

Eduardo Navarro's *Sound Mirror* and Prabhakar Pachpute's *Mountain Escape* both assign the environment a central role and the capacity to act: the mountain escapes, the palm tree whispers. Mountain and palm



Figure 2. *Escape de la Montaña/Mountain Escape* (2016). Acrylic, charcoal and pastel on wall, 6.5 × 12 m.

tree are thus subjects rather than objects. *Sound Mirror*, however, does so in a much more implicit manner than *Mountain Escape*.

In very general terms, the *Sound Mirror* connects visitors with the palm tree and bridges the building and its surrounding park. Thinking of the trumpet as prolonging the plant creates the association of crawling vines finding their way into an interior world. The listening device also recalls the saying that one should talk to plants so that they grow better. The instrument allows the CO₂ exhaled by humans and the O₂ produced by trees to circulate. The connection between tree and human is established not only through sound. Visitors inevitably follow the tube with their eyes and come to focus on the palm tree outside. If the building's glass wall is seen as a mirror, the visitor is reflected as a tree. Thus, visitor and tree can be interpreted as reflecting one another.

In addition, *Sound Mirror* emphasizes the commonalities between the palm tree and humans: Both are living beings, both breathe and emit sounds. In listening to the tree, visitors become aware of their commonality with all life, including plants. It thus addresses the widest possible public: All viewers are living human beings. Thus, *Sound Mirror* is relatively open in its aesthetic proposition and builds a public based on the commonality of all living creatures.

Navarro's installation also inverts the role of subject and object: visitors listen, the palm tree speaks. Plants are often perceived as objects. They decorate interiors and have occupied a subordinate role in paintings for centuries. In *Sound Mirror*, the plant becomes subject, producing a sound, and the human listens. Corresponding very much to Rancière's ideas, the installation changes the distribution of the sensible such that the tree becomes visible as a living creature, rather than as an inanimate object.

Visitors are thus invited to perceive the similarity between themselves and the palm tree through various mechanisms: a visual and auditive connection, a juxtaposition highlighting the similarities between onlooker and tree, as well as an inversion of roles. The artwork's message remains however relatively implicit—it is not clear, if it refers to this particular palm tree, palm trees in general (i.e., connected to the issue of palm oil), all trees or even all plants. This inversion was furthermore limited as visitors could still choose to listen (or not) to the palm tree. The palm tree, in contrast, had no choice about whether it wanted to be acoustically connected to the building.

The second artwork, Pachpute's *Mountain Escape* assigns agency to a landmass. The work presents the mountain in bright yellow and green, while faceless human beings appear in gray—the color of inanimate phenomena like stone and dust. Supported by the human feet beneath its base, the mountain seems to be walking. Viewers are invited to identify with the mountain rather than with their fellow human beings. In assigning agency to the mountain, *Mountain Escape*,

establishes a similarity between visitors and a moving landmass.

In contrast to *Sound Mirror*, *Mountain Escape*, besides stressing the shared quality of the mountain with visitors, also makes a quite explicit statement. It criticizes mining practices and takes a firm stance against multinational companies and government in particular mining sites. The catalog entry reads as follows:

Mining has led to the consumption of natural resources and, with it, to different forms of destruction. That is what has happened in the mountain in Marmato, Caldas, where big multinational companies, hoping to monopolize the extraction of resources, have displaced the local inhabitants who live by artisanal mining. In Latin America, cases like the abandoned gold mine in Sierra Pelada, in northern Brazil, are examples of the social and environmental devastation caused by large-scale mining.

In Colombia, protests against the social injustices caused by such mining have been systematically repressed by the State and paramilitaries, as happened in the massacre in Segovia, Antioquia, in 1982, where political interests were linked to the economic ones of the multinational which controlled gold-mining there. In the case of gold in Marmato, Pachpute came across people still fighting for their rights and resisting the pressures of big companies and the government, an example of activism which strengthens a social body engaged in a collective struggle. (Ministerio de Cultura, 2018)

The catalog entry for *Mountain Escape* clarifies the significance of the figures fighting on the platform. At Caldas, a large mining site in Colombia, multinational corporations and the government have forcefully replaced the artisanal mining long done by indigenous communities. The battle of the humanoids in the painting may refer to the battle over resources between different actors. Both the mountain and the fighting humanoids (government and multinationals) are borne by much smaller human figures (presumably workers and indigenous miners).

The catalog thus explicitly refers to two groups of people: the government and multinational big companies on the one hand and people fighting for their rights and opposing these mining practices on the other hand. The artwork reinforces onlookers' identification with the mountain, rather than their fellow human beings, by creating a division between the mountain, onlookers, indigenous communities and activists on the one hand, and the forces threatening the mountain (multinationals and the state) on the other. Rhetorically, the hostile group is disguised as the state and multinational corporations—institutions whose human nature is only visible at second glance. Visually, the opposing group is depicted as faceless and grey. These adversaries are easy to oppose because they are not self-evidently human. Pachpute's

artistic project strengthens the bond between the environment, indigenous communities and the onlookers by alienating another group (the multinationals and government). The multinationals and the government, cast as enemies, thus contribute to strengthening ties between the mountain and exhibition visitors. Yet this strategy also alienates certain actors—people working in multinationals or government—who might feel estranged rather than convinced by this clear opposition. *Mountain Escape*, by making its subjectification more explicit, also limits the extent of its potential reach.

Pachpute's reference to indigenous communities when addressing an environmental concern deserves further attention. Environmental concerns have been central in indigenous art for a long time (Horton, 2017). Their political struggle to gain recognition has at times coincided with their fight for recognizing the non-human as equal: By highlighting the deterioration of the environment in capitalist societies, indigenous lifestyles gain validity (Horton, 2017, p. 51). In this light, *Mountain Escape* addressing environmental concerns in current mining practices as well as citing indigenous mining as a counterexample may also express opposition against a colonial history. In this sense, *Mountain Escape* not only criticizes environmental overuse, but also a lifestyle that has been imposed upon Latin American societies by its colonizers.

Comparing the two artworks, Eduardo Navarro's *Sound Mirror* and Prabhakar Pachpute's *Mountain Escape* differ in the explicitness of a subjectification. The message of *Sound Mirror* is ambiguous: it is unclear whether the work refers to palm trees that are harvested for palm oil, or whether its subjectification is more general. In emphasizing the quality of being alive in all, *Sound Mirror's* message remains relatively open. *Mountain Escape*, on the other hand, is clear as to what it subjectifies: It explicitly names the mining sites which it wants to include in the public sphere and names the actors (corporate and government) to which it stands opposed.

4.2. Exhibition Context

Both artworks were shown at major art events in Latin America, but the exhibitions differ with respect to the audience they address. *Sound Mirror* was shown at the São Paulo Biennial in 2016. From the onset, this event was conceived with an international audience in mind. The São Paulo Biennial is the second oldest of its kind. A curated, bi-annual exhibition, it was founded in 1951 (Whitelegg, 2013). According to its first artistic director, Lourival Gomes Machado, the idea driving the São Paulo Biennial was to bring Brazilian modern art in contact with the rest of the world, and to make São Paulo an international artistic center. As such, the São Paulo Biennial was the forerunner of a wave of biennials to emerge in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, with the aim of counterbalancing the cultural and economic influence

of the Global North, be it the Iberian Peninsula or the United States (Gardner & Green, 2013, p. 448). Thus, from its very beginning, the São Paulo Biennial addressed an international audience.

In 2016, the 32nd version of the São Paulo Biennial was titled "Incerteza Viva" (living uncertainty). The introductory text referred to the show's location (in a park) and the union of nature and culture, as well as a connection between a local audience visiting the park, and the international public attending the biennial:

Ever since the start of the work for the 32nd Bienal—INCERTEZA VIVA, the curatorial team has shown interest in strengthening the connection between the Bienal and the park and the people who frequent it....It is important to emphasize that the exhibit design for the 32nd Bienal was conceived with a garden as its inspiration—a garden in which visitors are invited to different types of experiences, at times with more physical participation and involvement, at others with more contemplation in contact with a large amount of brand new works of art and those commissioned for the exhibition. In addition, some artistic projects occupy areas outside the Bienal Pavilion, establishing a direct dialogue with the park's public.

Sound Mirror, apart from connecting exhibition visitors and an exhibit, connects Biennale and park visitors through the shared experience of the visual impression of the palm tree. The palm tree is accessible also from the park. Park visitors can experience the palm tree without attending the Biennale. The artwork thus also connects very different audiences—the international visitors attending the biennale and the locals strolling through the park.

The São Paulo Biennial could thus be characterized as a quite international exhibition context, reaching out to visitors coming from all over the world. Moreover, the 32nd biennial aimed at connecting different kinds of public—the local families visiting the park as well as international art lovers.

The second artwork, *Mountain Escape*, was exhibited at the Salón Nacional de Artistas. The event takes place every year, with the 2016 edition being held in the city of Pereira. Although featuring international artists, the Colombian Salón Nacional de Artistas still addresses a predominantly domestic audience. The exhibition was first held in 1930, but has been disrupted several times by violence (Carrasco, 2006, p. 69; Figueroa, 2006, p. 48; González, 2006, p. 152; Rey-Márquez, 2006, pp. 13–14). It has always been a yearly national competition that invites artists to submit contributions for display. Originally founded to create a domestic art scene, the Salón Nacional de Artistas is still a curated exhibition today, but has lost some of its importance.

The history of the Salón Nacional de Artistas reflects the efforts to make this exhibition truly national, rather than merely confined to Bogotá, Colombia's capital, the

original venue. Throughout its history the Salón Nacional de Artistas catered and aimed at forming a national public. First held in Bogotá in 1930, the Salón Nacional de Artistas created a national audience for Colombia’s artists (Rey-Márquez, 2006, p. 34). During the late 1950s and the first half of the 1960s, it began taking place across the country. In 1961, part of the *Salón* was also shown in Ibagué (Tolima) and at the Primer Festival de Arte in Cali; in 1962, the opening was televised (Carrasco, 2006, p. 79). In 1976, the Salón Nacional de Artistas was further decentralized and regional calls and exhibitions were organized (Aranda, 2006, p. 131). In a further effort to decentralize the national exhibition, it was organized in Medellín in 1987 and in Cartagena in 1989 (González, 2006, pp. 158–159). In the 1990s, regional Salones de Artistas were organized in different Colombian cities (Ministerio de Cultura, 2018).

The 2016 Salón Nacional de Artistas was titled *Aún*, which translates as “still” or “so far.” The curators’ introduction linked this temporal expression to the local coffee-growing region and to notions of territory:

The title of this 44th edition of the National Salon is “AÚN,” meaning “yet,” “still” or “so far,” which indicates a period of transition, an approach proposed by a curatorial team....It is a vision inspired by local conditions—the Paisaje Cultural Cafetero [cultural coffee landscape]—that seeks to broadly approach notions of territory and its redefinition by political, historical, economic, social, and cultural influences. (Ministerio de Cultura, 2016, p. 14)

In contrast to the São Paulo Biennial, the Salón Nacional de Artistas connected to notions of territory, in addition to environmental concerns. Referring to local conditions and land might appeal more to the local audience, rather than international visitors and perhaps also reflects the more local orientation of the Salón Nacional de Artistas in contrast to the more international orientation of the Biennial.

5. Discussion

Mountain Escape’s relatively clear statement contrasts with *Sound Mirror’s* more ambiguous one. This observation becomes interesting given that its exhibition venue, the São Paulo Biennial, is more international than the Salón Nacional de Artistas. It is probably less congenial to confront international visitors from the Global North with the (wrong)doings of multinationals usually incorporated in those visitors’ home countries. International vis-

itors might feel alienated by Pachpute’s work. The Salón Nacional de Artistas is frequented largely by a domestic audience. Thus, a work holding foreign multinationals and the government responsible for Colombia’s abject working conditions and deteriorating environment might be more acceptable at this “local” exhibition than at the more international São Paulo event. In contrast, *Sound Mirror’s* more ambiguous message might be more palatable to international visitors, as it emphasizes the commonality of humans with nature, a message everybody more easily agrees with.

In a tentative interim conclusion, we would thus suggest that artworks reaching a wider audience have managed to create a consensus across wider audiences and institutions. It is plausible that less explicit artworks achieve this objective more straightforwardly. Hence, artworks that achieve international acclaim “hurt” less. The potential of artworks to increase the inclusiveness of a public sphere is limited by a trade-off: they either explicitly propose (political and societal) change or reach a wide(r) audience.

Table 2 summarizes this insight in a two-by-two matrix, with four quadrants. The comparison suggests that it is difficult to achieve a large audience and an explicit message (upper left quadrant). In contrast, it seems relatively easy to reach a small audience with an implicit message (lower right quadrant).

6. Conclusion

We developed a typology allowing us to assess how artworks contribute to a public sphere. Combining Rancière’s distribution of the sensible with Marchart’s critique, artworks’ contribution to an inclusive public sphere was conceptualized along the two axes “explicitness of the proposed subjectification” and the “size of the public addressed.” The article makes a rich literature that has aimed at conceptualizing artworks’ impact on communities accessible for analyzing the political impact of artworks. The typology shifts the attention to the reception process (explicitness of an artwork’s message and size of an audience). This makes it readily applicable for social sciences. In contrast to previous theories, it avoids relying on the specific characteristics of the artwork to conceptualize its social impact. Yet, it allows differentiating artworks’ contribution to a public sphere.

We illustrated the applicability of this typology compare how two different artworks, *Mountain Escape* by Prabhakar Pachpute and *Sound Mirror* by Eduardo Navarro, contribute to an inclusive public sphere. Structuring the analysis of our comparison with the

Table 2. Artworks’ to contribute to an inclusive public sphere.

	Large audience	Small audience
Explicit message	Difficult to achieve	More easily to achieve
Implicit message	More easily to achieve	Easy to achieve

typology we were able to understand what limited and endorsed the artworks' contribution to including the non-human as an acting subject to the public sphere. Comparing two different genres of artworks (a painting and an installation) showed that the typology can be applied to different kinds of artworks.

The comparison of the two artworks also showed that there might be a trade-off between the two dimensions: More explicit artworks may be more controversial and therefore more limited in their reach. Following our analysis, it is difficult for an artist to take an explicit stance, yet at the same time to attract a large audience. This insight also highlights the need for further research to understand what exhibition contexts permit for more explicit message, and to what extent the finding of this analysis is generalizable.

Moreover, further research is needed to understand the reasons behind such a dynamic. The current analysis suggests two potential mechanisms. First, explicit messages, rooted in a particular context may simply not be as interesting to a wider audience, and thus find it more difficult to gain a large audience. Second, explicit messages may not be as convenient for some of the visitors, especially at prestigious, international art events. Visitors of art events usually form part of an upper class (Bourdieu, 1984), whereas those seeking recognition in the public sphere are usually marginalized groups. While artworks have the potential to connect the two worlds, it may be a delicate line between voicing concerns explicitly and risk being excluded, and being more implicit, yet included in a show.

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Conflict of Interests

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