



Pierre Mertens

Contextual Artist

Friday, August 5, 2022 at 3:25 a.m.

I visited Documenta 15, and what I saw there gives me hope. It doesn't always have to be controversy.



Thai art from the Baan Noorg collective at Documenta.

Let me first outline what, to my surprise, is not shown on this edition of Documenta in Kassel. No millionaire artists, no top galleries promoting their artists worldwide, no celebration of the western, capital-driven art market. No 'new and old gods' traveling around in a carousel of biennials and art fairs. They are not invited here. Finally, I'd say.

What is there to see, perhaps not coincidentally by a collectively curated edition? Art that puts the group above the individual. The community where art originates and creates images that are meaningful to that community. Activist art from oppressed populations.

- **Documenta: anti-Semitism or culture clash**

Documenta has turned the iceberg and shows everything that has remained underwater until now. Here you are not looking for name tags of famous artists, but for a text to better understand the context of the work.

The western contemporary art world developed its own language and looked from high up to art from other continents. In this Documenta, those other cultures look at the contemporary Western art scene. That makes this edition an exercise in modesty.

Unnamed mask

Was it not Jan Van Eyck who was one of the first to explicitly sign a painting in the first half of the 15th century? The growing attention for the individual has strongly influenced politics and art in the Western world. This phenomenon reached its peak in the last century, when artists, displaced from their land, addressed the world as idiosyncratic gods.

The artful African or Asian mask is usually not signed by the artist. That doesn't make him any less of an artist. There is no one in his community who can do it as well as he. This gives him an important place in his world, because he makes meaningful images to deal with the events of life. He gives in all modesty something back to the world of which he is a product. Isn't that the essence of art? Creating an image that others can use to move on.

This Documenta is about the group, about artists' collectives, and that is a welcome response to an egocentric and narcissistic century that celebrated the individual and consumed the planet.