

**The performance of *The Modern Procession*
What happens when art walks into town**



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Leiden University, 2018-2019
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02-08-2019

Abstract

This thesis analyzes the art performance *The Modern Procession*, organized by the Museum of Modern Art in collaboration with Belgium-Mexican artist Francis Alÿs (1959), and performed on June 23, 2002, in New York City.

By using interdisciplinary literary research and comparative media research, this unique performance is first studied from an art performance perspective, with a focus on art performances held on the streets. Secondly the performance is placed in the context of definitions of religious processions, and in the third chapter, *the Modern Procession* is analyzed from an anthropological and social-geographical standpoint.

This thorough analysis does not only reveal the many layers of *the Modern Procession*, but also what happens when art is taken out of the museum and presented in a new context. By presenting the collection of the MoMA on the streets of New York, the connection between collections and museums is made clear: it is namely art that forms the real heart of a museum, not the building where it is displayed.

Keywords: The Modern Procession, Francis Alÿs, the Museum of Modern Art, MoMA, art procession, processions, art performance, New York City.

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Introduction: a procession performed unlike any other

“Art is the new religion, and museums are the new cathedrals.”¹ This quote from philosopher Allan de Botton struck something in me, because looking at the world today, art seems more popular than ever. Whereas people in the past used to travel from far and wide to places like Santiago de Compostella to see the shrine of apostle James, nowadays people do the same to see the Mona Lisa in the Louvre. However, I believe that what draws people to shrines or paintings might be the same thing. Whether it is a relic of a saint or an artwork, people hope to find inspiration in it, strength, or comfort. Perhaps it is this wish that is turning “museums into churches”.

Yet where churches of the past were much more connected with the community and everyday life, museums remain an infrequent place to visit. Museums rarely share their collection with society, as churches do in processions. During these, the icons of a church are carried through town, showing people that these sacred objects belonged to them just as well as to the church. With museums, you are only allowed to see the art if you buy a ticket.

This is why I found *the Modern Procession*, an art performance held in New York in 2002, was such a surprising and special event. Where processions usually are religious of nature, in this procession modern works of art stood at its center. *The Modern Procession* namely was organized by the Museum of Modern Art in collaboration with the Mexican-Belgian artist Francis Alÿs (1959), to commemorate the museum’s collection moving from its old location in Manhattan to a temporary building in Queens. This move was visualized by literally carrying art from the MoMA’s collection from Manhattan to Queens, accompanied by much fanfare: a brass band, a horse, and 100 volunteers throwing rose petals walked alongside the artworks. Although *the Modern Procession* was only performed once, the whole performance was recorded and the film shown in MoMA QNS, enabling visitors to witness the procession again.²

Watching this film of *the Modern Procession*³, the idea of a religious procession immediately came to my mind. The artworks are being carefully carried as if they are sacral icons, rose petals scattered before the carriers’ feet, and the music of the brass band replaces the singing of hymns. Yet to name *the Modern Procession* a religious procession feels premature: the artworks that are carried around are not just any kind of artworks. They are the painting *Les Femmes d’Alger* by Pablo Picasso, the bronze statue *Standing Woman* by Alberto Giacometti, and *Bicycle Wheel* by Marcel Duchamp. These are famous works of modern art, which you cannot easily compare to sacral objects. Not only that, the fourth artwork was a living person – artist Kiki Smith (1954) – who was carried around like a queen sitting on her palanquin. She is not like a lifeless icon; she stares back at the crowd.

Kiki Smith’s presence brought performance art to my mind, in which an artist wishes to directly connect with its audience by making themselves (part of) the artwork. Especially

¹ Alain de Botton, “Alain de Botton on Art as Therapy”, *The School of Life*, published on December 3, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFnNgTskHPM>

² Tom Eccles, “Outside Intervention: the Making of the Modern Procession,” in *Francis Alÿs: The Modern Procession*, ed. Francis Alÿs and Anne Wehr (New York: Public Art Fund, 2004), 11

³ Francis Alÿs, “The Modern Procession” (movie), *Francis Alÿs*, <http://francisalys.com/the-modern-procession/>

around the 1960's, artists like Joseph Beuys, Nam June Paik, and Wim T. Schippers used performance art to ask their audience questions about art. Can a person be an artwork? If the audience participates in the performance, do they become the artist of the work too? And if the performance is held outside instead of inside a museum or a gallery, does that make the performance less impressive? Such questions are present within the *Modern Procession* as well: who is the artist of *the Modern Procession*? Can *the Modern Procession* be seen as an art performance, or rather a means to show off the artworks of the MoMA?

There are many contradicting elements to *the Modern Procession* that prevent me from naming it either an art performance or a religious procession: as it appears, the performance seems to bring different worlds together. As discussed above, *the Modern Procession* has links with the field of performance art, with the field of religious performances, and yet it has something different too. By taking the artworks of the Museum of Modern Art out of the museum, the artworks are suddenly shown without that context. People watching *the Modern Procession* might recognize the artworks as belonging to the MoMA, but nothing in the procession signifies them as such. The artworks are on their own, leaving people on the streets of New York to view the works with a different set of eyes, uncolored by the reputation of the MoMA or the presence of the museum (building). By changing the presentation of the artworks so strongly, do we still look at them in the same way?

Because I am so fascinated by the complexity of *the Modern Procession*, I have therefore chosen the performance as the main subject for my graduate thesis. To understand *the Modern Procession* and its different facets, I will study the performance by asking the following research question:

What happens during *the Modern Procession*, organized by artist Francis Aljys and the MoMA, to the modern artworks once they are taken out of the museum and carried around in a procession? How can *the Modern Procession* be understood from the perspective of definitions of religious processions, as an art performance, and from an anthropological and social geographical perspective?

To answer my research question, I will be using interdisciplinary literary research and comparative media research. My primary source will be the catalogue of *the Modern Procession*, published by the MoMA in 2004. In this catalogue are drawings reproduced of the procession made by Francis Aljys himself, emails between the MoMA staff and the artist about the procession, and lists about possible artworks that would be carried around.

Next to this catalogue, I will be using secondary literature to answer my sub-questions. By using the literature from authors like Robert Orsi, (*Gods of the City: religion and the American Urban Landscape*), Hans Belting (*An Anthropology of Images*), and RoseLee Goldberg (*Performance: Live Art 1909 until the Present*), I will gain a better understanding of religious processions, anthropological theories relating to art, and performance art in the 20th century.

As for the study of media, I will firstly be using a variation of photographs and film stills made of *the Modern Procession*, printed in the catalogue of the MoMA. Pictures, drawings

and lists made by the artist in collaboration with the MoMA, which are featured in the catalogue, will also give me a better idea of the construction and outlook of the procession.

As for the structure of my thesis, I will start from a contemporary art-historical context by analyzing *the Modern Procession* in the tradition of art performances. In my second chapter I will use a cultural-historical context related to religious processions to study *the Modern Procession*, and then for my third chapter, I will use an anthropological and social geographical context. By starting with art-historical and slowly moving towards a more abstract analysis, I will gain better understanding of the different layers to *the Modern Procession*.

Ultimately, by researching *the Modern Procession* in such a thorough way, I will learn not only more about the performance itself, but also about what the performance reveals about the connection between art and museums.

Chapter 1: Performance art and *the Modern Procession*

*The Modern Procession announced the temporary move of the MoMA from Manhattan to Queens, and will celebrate the entry of its permanent collection into the periphery. The pilgrimage will take the guise of a traditional ritual procession: a selection of MoMA's masterpieces will be carried on palanquins, a Peruvian brass band will set the pace of the journey, and rose petals will be strewn in its path while fireworks will rise up at street corners. [...] By enshrining modern art icons as if they were religious idols, and by parading them with due ceremony along the streets of New York, the Modern Procession teases and questions of status of the consecrated art object in our 21-st century society. It also surreptitiously inserts a grand-scale performance into the opening of the MoMA QNS, a discipline strangely absent from MoMA's six departments of the arts.*⁴

On June 23, 2002, citizens of New York City were surprised by a large group of people walking through the streets of Manhattan. Not that the city was not used to parades, but normal parades do not have modern art works as part of them. The *Bicycle Wheel* (1951) by Marcel Duchamp, *Standing Woman* (1948) by Giacometti, and *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1911) by Picasso seemed to be the centerpieces, followed by a real artist carried on a palanquin. Kiki Smith (1954) sat amidst the parades like a Madonna-statue on her throne, moving so little as if she was a real statue herself.⁵ Yet, although there was a brass band playing music, the mood of the parade felt quite sober.

The people walking alongside the artworks looked straight ahead and made little contact with either the bystanders on the street, or with the works they carried. During the whole march, which started at the MoMA's original building at 53rd street in Manhattan and ended at the MoMA's temporary location in 33rd street in Queens, the whole group stayed 'focused' on its goal.

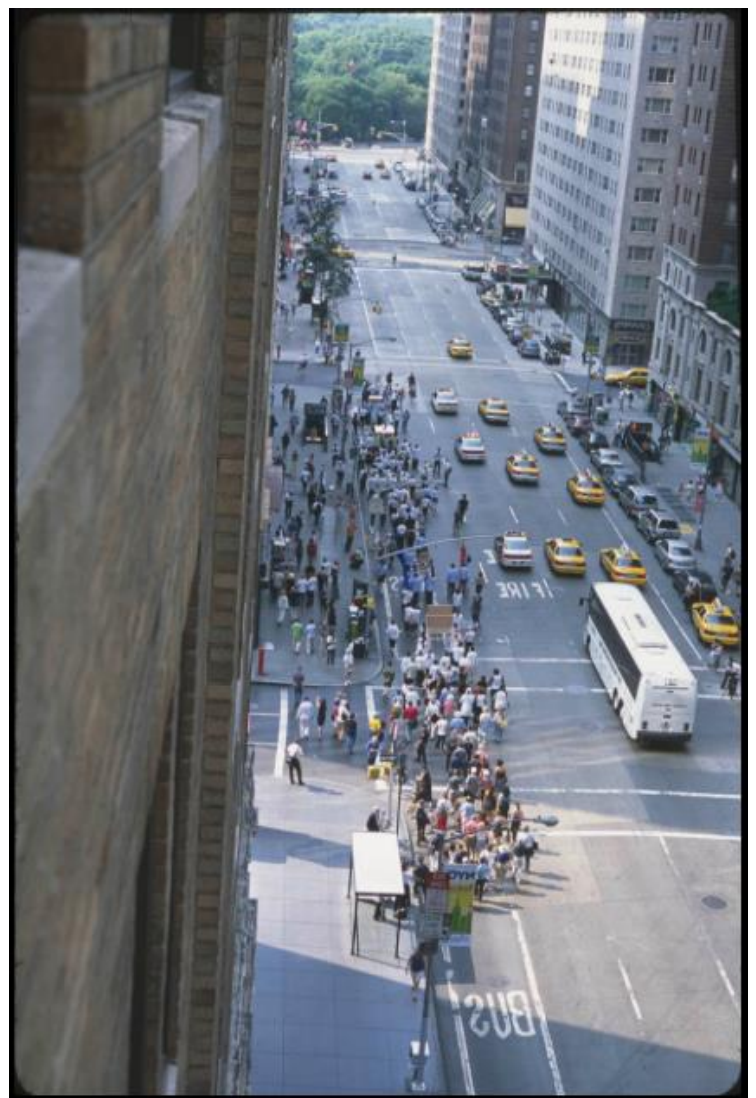


Figure 2: Francis Alÿs & the MoMA, *The Modern Procession*, 2002

⁴ Email send from Francis Alÿs to Harper Montgomery, send on June 15, 2000. Reproduced down in: Francis Alÿs. *Francis Alÿs: The Modern Procession*. New York: Public Art Fund, (2004), 13

⁵ Alÿs, *The Modern Procession*, 23

This was exactly the idea what the Belgian-Mexican performance-artist Francis Alÿs had in mind when he set up the plan for *the Modern Procession*. For Alÿs, the Museum of Modern Art was ‘an institution of religious significance’⁶, and what better way to pay homage to its art, than by organizing a special kind of performance? Not a festive parade, but a powerful pilgrimage. The artist hoped that seeing the works would make the public reflect on the art, and on its bond with the city of New York.⁷ A year after the disastrous September 11, to suddenly see a procession of important artworks carried through the once heavily guarded streets, must have brought the citizens of New York quite a lot to reflect about.

Before I take a closer look at the reactions to *the Modern Procession*, I want to analyze what insights are provided through considering *the Modern Procession* as an art performance. Regardless of the artworks carried around during the procession, *the Modern Procession* itself is an artwork designed by an artist. Francis Alÿs himself performs often on the street; the streets of Mexico City in particular, where he has lived and worked since the end of the 1980’s. From pulling a toy-dog through the streets to documenting the daily life of people hanging around the city’s central square: the interaction between the street and its people fascinates the artist. Alÿs was not alone in this fascination; especially in the world of performance art, the street draws artists in for various reasons. Before I take a closer look at the street, I want to start with a brief history of the performance art itself, and show how *the Modern Procession* fits into that tradition.

1.1 A brief history of Performance Art

Before I place *the Modern Procession* within the tradition of performance art, I need to define what an art performance exactly is. According to the definition of art historian RoseLee Goldberg, an art performance is a performance within the context of art, in which different kinds of media are used – often interdisciplinary – in front of a live audience.⁸ The performance itself can be scripted or unscripted, random or carefully orchestrated, and be planned with or without audience participation in mind. Neither are there any limits to a performance, it can happen anywhere and last for any length of time. The start and the end of the performance are decided by the actions of the artist or the group performing. *The Modern Procession* fits perfectly within that description of performance art.

The similarities do not stop there. Looking at the beginning of the 20th century, where artists held performances that, in hindsight, can be classified as ‘art performances’, the ideas behind these performances are quite alike *the Modern Procession*. I will discuss a few of them, explain who made the performance and why, and later relate the performances to *the Modern Procession*.

The Italian Futurists were one of the first groups whom brought art on stage. Artists like Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Giacomo Balla, and Umberto Boccioni had been inspired by what they had seen in Paris. At the beginning of the 20th century, actors and poets in this city often came together in café’s and salons to share ideas. Many of them were inspired by the

⁶ Alÿs, *The Modern Procession*, 12

⁷ Alÿs, *The Modern Procession*, 88

⁸ RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 6

start of a new century, and wished to break with old (art) traditions and create something new. Searching for a new kind of art, artists and poets showed or presented their new work or ideas on a stage, awaiting the reaction of the public to see if they agreed with the new ideas.

Inspired by these artistic performances in Paris, the Futurists tried to create a similar kind of movement in Italy. In line with the Futurists' 'wild and dynamic' opinions about art, the Futurist painters used performances as their most direct means of forcing an audience to take note of their ideas.⁹ To them, 'The spectator must live at the center of the painted action.'¹⁰ These spectators rarely agreed to be in this center, so often Futurist performers were pelted with potatoes and oranges by their audience. Apart from 'waking up the audience', Marinetti saw another upside to performances: the fact that they were so disruptive and anti-academic, made them the perfect way to break with old art traditions. According to Marinetti, the performances "destroy the Solemn, the Sacred, the Serious and the Sublime in Art with a capital A."¹¹

While the Futurists died down around 1930, in other countries artists too started to use performances to share their ideas with an audience. Where in Italy Cubist painters were part of the Futurist movement, the Russian Constructivists saw brushes as 'outdated tools'.¹² They preferred circus acts, ballets and opera performances, as these were popular forms of entertainment able to attract a larger audience than people only interested in paintings. Artists part of the DADA group however, used mainly spoken word and literature in their performances, using their art to attack the 'civilized world' that had caused World War I to take place.¹³ After the 1930's the popularity of performances went down, until the medium came back around the 1960's. After the devastation of the Second World War, artists started to experiment in the hopes to bring inspiration and new energy to the (art) world, and performances were a good medium for that.¹⁴

Regardless of using spoken word, opera, or paintings, the purpose of a performance was the same: to challenge the conventional forms of traditional art. Many artists in the 20th century felt like these traditional art forms – paintings and sculptures – did not meet the artist's needs anymore, and so they opted for a new art form that blended different types of art together.¹⁵ Neither did the artist want to present this new type of art form in a 'conventional way' to the public. Instead of the traditional museums and galleries, most performances were held in theatres, clubs, or on the street. The audience watching was not asked to simply observe, but to actively participate or react to the performances. And where the first performances were announced beforehand, so that their audience was not caught completely unaware, performances of the 1960's were performed outside without a warning. This indeed brought out reactions from the public, although not always the positive kind.

⁹ Goldberg, *Performance*, 12-13

¹⁰ Goldberg, *Performance*, 13

¹¹ Goldberg, *Performance*, 14

¹² Goldberg, *Performance*, 22-26

¹³ Alfred H. Barr, *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1946), 55-57

¹⁴ Anthony Howell, *The analysis of Performance art*, (Oxfordshire, Francis and Taylor Group, 1999), 178-180

¹⁵ Howell, *The analysis of Performance art*, 22-24

It is important to note however, that the groups mentioned above – The Futurists, DADA, and the Russian Constructivists – are called ‘performance artists’ in hindsight. They did not call themselves so: for these artists, performances were a tool, not a medium on its own. Only during the 1960’s and 1970’s, one can speak of a performance art-movement, wherein artists considered their performances as ‘works of art’.

Although *the Modern Procession* was held in the 21st century, there is a resemblance between the procession and performances organized in the early 20th century. *The Modern Procession* used different kinds of art in their performance: artworks of the MoMA were carried around, and the Peruvian brass band played music. Francis Alÿs himself was present as well, although he blended in with the crowd of volunteers; nothing signaled him out as the leader. Secondly, *the Modern Procession* was performed on the streets of New York, showing itself to the pedestrians and inviting them to react. This location is central to the power of *the Modern Procession*; if it was held in the Museum itself, the performance’s power would be very different.

What makes the streets such an intriguing place for artists to organize a performance? To answer this question, I will take a closer look at the work of Dutch performance artists Wim T. Schippers (1942) and Stanley Brouwn (1935-2017). These artists became known in the 1960’s with their performances on the streets of Amsterdam, although both men had their own reasons for using the streets as their place to perform. By studying their work, as well as the work of Francis Alÿs, I hope to gain insight into why the streets are so important in the performances of these artists. This knowledge in turn will help me understand *the Modern Procession*.

1.2 Performances on the streets of Amsterdam: Wim T. Schippers and Stanley Brouwn

For my research, I am interested in the performances organized by Dutch performance artist Wim T. Schippers not only for their location, but also for Schippers’ idea behind the performance. Similar to artists at the beginning of the 20th century, who wished to break open old artistic traditions and share their new ideas with the public, Schippers tried to do the same. The streets are the perfect place to catch people by surprise and show them art in a new way. I will give a brief account of the performances organized by Schippers, and look at what role the streets of Amsterdam played in them.

At the beginning of the 1960’s, Dutch artist Wim T. Schippers (1942) was part of the A-Dynamische Groep (the A-dynamic Group), set up with artist Ger van Elk and photographer Bob Westdorp.¹⁶ The group was inspired by the Fluxus movement: a large group of international artists who used different kinds of media in their experimental performances and art works.¹⁷ To Fluxus, the artistic process itself was more important than the finished product.

One of the first performances of the A-Dynamische Groep was *Manifestatie aan het Strand te Petten*. On the 29th of October, 1961, Schippers marched with a group of 30 people to the strand of Petten, a little town in the province of North Holland.¹⁸ Arriving at the ocean,

¹⁶ Harry Ruhé, *The Best of Wim T. Schippers*. (Centraal Museum: Utrecht, 2007), 12

¹⁷ Howell, *The analysis of Performance art*, 122

¹⁸ Ruhé, *The best of Wim T. Schippers*, 25

Schippers emptied a bottle of lemonade in the water. This march was repeated in 1963 and broadcasted on national television. The main reaction of the Dutch public was confusion: what was the point of this ‘art performance’?¹⁹ This reaction was what Schippers hoped: for people to ask themselves what exactly art is.

However, for my comparative research, I want to take a closer look to another performance by Schippers, performed on the streets of Amsterdam. The performance is described by Dutch curator Harry Ruhé as followed:

On Friday December 6, 1963 – at 3 o’clock in the afternoon exactly, six immaculately dressed gentlemen left the tunnel of the Central Station. They walked via a route which took them past the Martelaarsgracht, Nieuwendijk, Dam, Kalverstraat, Muntplein and Reguliersbreestraat to the Rembrandtsplein where they dispersed. The six were followed by photographers and several policemen, while a television camera was in attendance to record the event.²⁰

This event was called *Mars door Amsterdam* (March through Amsterdam).

The *Mars door Amsterdam* had no clear goal: it took place, and that was enough for the artists. The event was staged under the auspices of *Afsrinmor-International* with the aim of staging more marches in other ‘major cities’.²¹ Despite this declaration and the posters hung in the city of Amsterdam announcing the performance, the march itself drew little attention from the pedestrians.

While there were no posters announcing *The Modern Procession*, it did not just

suddenly start on a Sunday morning: years for preparation and talks with several agencies came before the performance. Moreover, the procession is similar to the *Manifestatie* and *Mars door Amsterdam* in its wish to be ‘noticed’ by an audience (whether they saw the performance live or on television): people were asked to reflect on the performance and question their ideas of art. However, whereas the *Manifestatie* was broadcasted on TV and reached a wide public, the *Mars door Amsterdam* caught less attention.



Figure 3: Wim T. Schippers (man with glasses in the front), *Mars door Amsterdam*, 1963.

¹⁹ Ruhé, *The Best of Wim T. Schippers*, 27-28

²⁰ Ruhé, *The Best of Wim T. Schippers*, 56-59

²¹ Ruhé, 62-63

Not that Schippers did not try: the march had been announced reasonably beforehand, police walked alongside the ‘procession’, and the whole *Mars* was recorded.

Yet the public reaction was now not so loud. Why? Was it because the streets were full of pedestrians, unlike the beach of Petten, and therefore the *Mars* was swallowed by the crowds? Because now Schippers walked alongside five other men, and was not the clear leader? Is that even necessary, for the leader or artist to be clearly visible during the performance?

Considering that last question, I will take a look at the work of artist Stanley Brouwn, whom also performed on the streets of Amsterdam, but unlike Schippers, did not seek any attention at all. Where Schippers had his performances broadcasted on national television, and later even went on producing several TV-programs and a radio-show, Brouwn sought a different connection with the public.

Artist Stanley Brouwn was born in Paramaribo, Suriname, 1935, and came to Amsterdam in 1957.²² Brouwn’s first works were pieces he himself did not ‘make’: instead, he laid paper on the street and an unexpected cyclist or pedestrian created the artwork as they cycled or walked over it.²³ Without realizing it, the people became the artists who captured movement and time on paper.

In his works made in the 1960’s, Brouwn becomes more visible. The artist would approach random people on the street, and ask them to draw directions to a particular place on a piece of paper.²⁴ By giving these drawings the title *This way, Brouwn*, he created art that was both personal and abstract. The drawn directions were a reflection of a person’s thoughts, yet who that person is remains a mystery. Anyone could have drawn them. Even blank pieces of paper – if participants did not know the way – were considered art to Brouwn: the blankness captured the thought process of his ‘art-partner’. The idea of ‘trying to find the way’ is more important than the (possible) drawn map.

In the 1970’s this fascination with walking (on the street) continued. Brouwn started to record his own footsteps in various cities on index cards, which he then

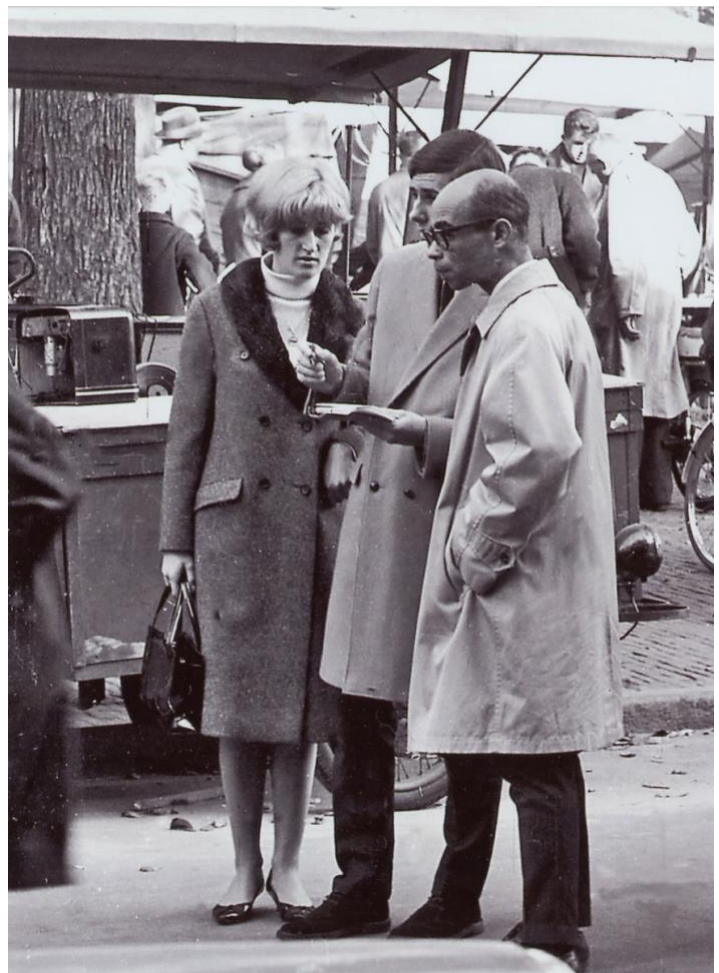


Figure 4: Stanley Brouwn (wearing glasses), *This Way Brouwn*, 1964.

²² Carel Blotkamp and Camiel van Winkel, *Conceptuele Kunst in Nederland en België 1965-1975*. (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2002), 145

²³ Blotkamp, *Conceptuele Kunst in Nederland en België 1965-1975*, 146

²⁴ Blotkamp, *Conceptuele Kunst*, 147

stored in grey metal filing cabinets.²⁵ In these cabinets, personal experience became objectified and the subject – the artist – disappeared. The echo of a walk on the street are all that was left. This idea of absence is what intrigued Brouwn: the artist should try to avoid being the creator of art as much as possible.²⁶

It is that role of the artist in the performance that applies to *The Modern Procession* as well. Brouwn is the instigator of *This Way, Brouwn* and left the papers on the street for the cyclists to cycle over, but you do not see his presence return in his art. This is similar to the connection between Francis Alÿs and *the Modern Procession*: although Alÿs came up with the idea, in the end the artist was lost in the crowd of volunteers who all performed the procession together.

Following the definition of RoseLee Goldberg of performance art - the start and the end of the performance are decided by the actions of the artist or the group performing – the artist of *The Modern Procession* is therefore not just Francis Alÿs, but all the people who are part of the procession. Alÿs is one of them, but just like Wim T. Schippers in the *Mars door Amsterdam*, he was not the leader of the group.

Another parallel between Brouwn and Alÿs is the fascination with walking. By recording footprints and turning drawn instructions into an artwork, Brouwn wanted to make the invisible parts of the street visible. In his own work, Francis Alÿs is fascinated by the act of walking as well, and before organizing *The Modern Procession*, used walking in several performances of his own. Why is walking so fascinating for Alÿs, and can you see this fascination return in *The Modern Procession*?

1.3 Francis Alÿs and the art of walking

Francis Alÿs arrived in Mexico City in 1985 as an architect, tasked to help the city rebuild after a devastating earthquake. While being stationed here, Alÿs felt the urge not only use his architectural knowledge to rebuild the city, but also to use the city to make art.²⁷ Mexico City fascinated the artist because it is a place that “is constantly pushing back and forth between the embrace of modernity and a resistance against it. It is three layers of Pre-Hispanic, colonial and modern co-exist more than overlap; it is this capacity of flirting with modernity without giving in that fascinates me.”²⁸ In 1993, Alÿs decided to give up on his job as an architect and focus only on his career as an artist.

Most of his art are art performances, performed on the streets of Mexico City. Yet where Schippers led a procession and Brouwn asked pedestrians the way, Alÿs walked the streets alone. *In Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing* (1997), Alÿs pushed a big block of

²⁵ Blotkamp, 149-150

²⁶ Oscar van den Boomgaard, “In Search of Stanley Brouwn,” *Frieze*, published on March 12, 2014, <https://frieze.com/article/search-stanley-brouwn>

²⁷ Medina Cuauhtemoc, Russell Ferguson and Jean Fisher. *Francis Alÿs [Alÿs]*. (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2007), 8

²⁸ Cuauhtemoc, *Francis Alÿs [Alÿs]*, 11

ice for nine hours through the streets of Mexico City.²⁹ At the end, the block has melted to the size of a little ball that he can kick through the street. In *Re-enactments* (2000), Francis Alÿs walked the streets of Mexico City visibly carrying a gun, while he is being filmed.³⁰ After eleven minutes of the performance, people come to arrest the artist. The next day, Alÿs repeated the action, now with permission of the police. Of course, one person can



Figure 5: Francis Alÿs, *Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing*, 1997.

never repeat the same action in the exact same way, but having now permission almost makes it harder to distinguish if the performance is meant to be spontaneous or intentional.

Whether he carries a block of ice or a gun with him, these performances involve walking through the streets (of Mexico City). About the act of walking itself, Alÿs had the following to say:

Walking, in particular drifting, or strolling, is already – within the speed culture of our time – a kind of resistance. Paradoxically it's also the last private space, safe from the phone or email. But it also happens to be very immediate method for unfolding stories. It's an easy, cheap act to perform or to invite others to perform. The walk is simultaneously the material out of which to produce art and the modus operandi of the artistic transaction. And the city always offers the perfect setting for accidents to happen.

[...]

There is no theory of walking, just a consciousness. But there can be a certain wisdom involved in the act of walking. It's more an attitude, and it is one that fits me all right. It's a state where you can be both alert to all that happens in your peripheral vision and hearing, and yet totally lost in your thought process.³¹

It is interesting to see how every artist discussed so far is intrigued by the street for a different reason. Where Schippers used *Mars door Amsterdam* as a place to reach an audience, Brouwn used the streets in search of 'fellow artists' to make art that would reveal the 'hidden' parts of

²⁹ Alÿs, "Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing." Francis Alÿs, <http://francisalys.com/sometimes-making-something-leads-to-nothing/>

³⁰ Alÿs, "Re-enactments," Francis Alÿs, <http://francisalys.com/re-enactment/>

³¹ Cuauhtemoc, Francis Alÿs [Alÿs], 31-32

the street. Lastly, Francis Alÿs is more interested by the act of walking; not only because (the streets of) Mexico City fascinate him, but because the act of walking itself has artistic value. To Alÿs, it is the ‘modus operandi of the artistic transaction.’

The decision therefore to carry the artworks during *the Modern Procession* gets extra weight. Alÿs could have transported the artworks of the MoMA on open carts or wagons, but he made the decision to let people carry them. While the participants hold Duchamp’s *Bicycle Wheel* on their shoulders and hear the music of the brass band, the thoughts of the bearers can be miles away. They are both in the moment and outside it, part of an art performance, and at the same time partaking in the art of walking as well.

1.4 *The Modern Procession*: a delegated performance

At the beginning of this chapter I aimed to investigate what insights are provided by considering *the Modern Procession* as performance art, and what can be learned from comparing *the Modern Procession* with other art performances organized on the streets. Following Goldberg’s definition of performance art, *the Modern Procession* can indeed be classified as such. Similar to the performances of the Russian Constructivists, the DADA movement, and the Futurists, *the Modern Procession* too aimed at sharing new ideas about art with its public. The streets are a good location of finding this public, made clear by the performances of Wim T. Schippers on the streets of Amsterdam. Moreover, the pieces of paper with Stanley Brouwn’s drawn-instructions show that the artist himself does not have to be at the center of the performance for it to have an impact. To create *This Way, Brouwn*, Brouwn and the pedestrian participating were of equal importance. *The Modern Procession*, although invented by Francis Alÿs, would be nothing without a large group of volunteers helping him.

This group of volunteers is important in another way, if you consider Claire Bishop’s theory of the Delegated Performance.³² In her paper, Bishop defines this kind of performance as an artist hiring nonprofessionals to do the performance in his or her place; instead of the artist being present to give the performance power, it is now a collective body that does the same.³³ This type of performance – which have been on the rise since the 1990’s – stands in contrast with performances held in the 1960’s and 1970’s, where performance artists invited people from the audience to participate. *Rhythmn 0* for example would not have worked if people had not shown up to attack Marina Abramovic.³⁴ In the case of *the Modern Procession*, the collective body is formed by a group of people chosen by the artist, all following his or her instructions. Hereby, the group performs the work in the artist’s stead.

In her essay, Bishop mentions three reasons why an artist would hire volunteers to perform the work: they could hire nonprofessionals based on (a part of) their identities, based on the nonprofessionals’ profession, or based on the sensitivity of the performance. *The Modern Procession* can be placed under the second kind: the brass band was chosen because they played the kind of music necessarily to march on. The people carrying the artworks were

³² Claire Bishop, "Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authenticity", *CUNY Academic Works* (2012), http://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_pubs/45

³³ Bishop, "Delegated Performance," 91

³⁴ Bishop, "Delegated Performance," 94-96

chosen because they had past experience with carrying palanquins.³⁵ The other volunteers were picked because they were familiar with the Museum of Modern Art. Everyone walking in the procession was chosen for their profession and knowledge, which enabled them to perform *the Modern Procession* to the best of their abilities.

However, whether it is the artist or a group performing, the performance always aims to connect with the public. How did people on the street of New York respond to *the Modern Procession*? Although Alÿs hoped that people would not start clapping or cheering, *the Modern Procession* was meant to invoke something. The procession is not done by a small, quiet group of people, like Schippers' *Mars door Amsterdam*: due to its size and the music of the brass band, everyone would notice the procession walking down the street.

I was only able to find a couple of press articles about *the Modern Procession*: one from the *New York Times*, one published on the website of *PR Week*, and a mention of the performance on a television program. In the article of the *New York Times*, Celestine Bohlen describes *the Modern Procession* as being part of a “series of attention-getting ploys” organized to make people take notice of the MoMA's new address.³⁶ Tanya Lewis of the *PR Week* writes that *the Modern Procession* was not part of the MoMA's PR plan for the MoMA QNS building, but “due to the festive nature of the procession, it was picked up by the media, and it did benefit the communications effort.”³⁷ In the news-program of WABC-TV (ABC), the co-anchor of the show, Lori Stokes, describes the procession as following:

“It wasn't a festival exactly, but it was certainly festive. Yesterday was moving day at the Museum of Modern Art. Instead of using shipping trucks, the museum recruited volunteers - that's right - to form a procession carrying priceless works of art to the museum's temporary new home in Long Island City. (Clips of people carrying artwork). The converted warehouse will be home to MoMA, as art lovers know it, while its landmark home in Midtown undergoes renovation (clips of MoMA being renovated).”

Steve Bartelstein, co-anchor:

*You know what? That's just going to give her ideas, Billy-the chair being carried like that.”*³⁸

The latter is a remark about artist Kiki Smith, whom was being carried in a chair during the performance.

³⁵ Eccles, “Outside Intervention: the making of the Modern Procession”, in *Francis Alÿs: the Modern Procession*, 14-15

³⁶ Celestine Bohlen, “The Modern Moves With a Bang (Several)”, *The New York Times*, published on June 26, 2002. <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/26/arts/the-modern-moves-with-a-bang-several.html?searchResultPosition=1>

³⁷ Tanya Lewis, “ORGANIZATION CASE STUDY: MoMA relocation focuses on community commitment,” *PR Week*, published on October 21, 2002: <https://www.prweek.com/article/1233297/organization-case-study-moma-relocation-focuses-community-commitment>

³⁸ Transcript of WABC-TV (ABC) Channel Seven news segment, broadcasted on June 24, 2002, between 5:00 – 7:00 AM during the program *News*. Written down in: Alÿs, *Francis Alÿs: The Modern Procession*, 72

The press articles and the news-segment prove that the procession caught people's attention and that – the news at least – was aware that the procession was connected to the MoMA's temporary move. Yet neither the news nor the writers of the articles interviewed witnesses to learn how they reacted to the procession. The only piece of information about people's response to *the Modern Procession*, is mentioned in an article from Harper Montgomery, curator of the MoMA. She describes a moment between a mother and daughter following the procession. The daughter does so reluctantly, the mother because the procession reminded her of the religious pageants of her youth.³⁹ After following the procession down several blocks, the mother and daughter return to their original purpose. "Alÿs would probably be encouraged by their disparate responses", reflects Montgomery, "and he would not mind that they had not tagged along all the way to the procession's destination, MoMA QNS; other would join in where they left off."⁴⁰

A nice description, although knowing that Montgomery is connected to the MoMA, makes me wonder how realistic her story is. Yet that idea of the public being free to watch the performance for as long as they please, brings back the performances of Brouwn and Schippers. People could draw instructions for Brouwn, or they could not; regardless, Brouwn saw the pieces of paper as art. Schippers neither minded if people understood what his performance was about: the fact that they observed the performance and made an effort to understand it, was enough to him. Trying to engage a person's thought process is important to Francis Alÿs as well, which you can see in the choice to let the volunteers walk the streets of New York while carrying the artworks. For Alÿs, 'the walk is simultaneously the material out of which to produce art and the modus operandi of the artistic transaction.' It is not just the *Modern Procession* that wants to provoke the public on the street; at the same time, the art of walking is stimulating the volunteers of the performance to let their minds wander. It is this call for engagement of the mind that makes me name *the Modern Procession* an art performance.

On the other hand, Montgomery mentions something in the story that fascinates me: the mother wanting to follow the procession since it reminds her of religious pageants. After studying *the Modern Procession* from an art performance-perspective, I will analyze it from a religious point of view in the next chapter.

³⁹ Harper Montgomery and Francesco Pellizzi, "Project 76: Francis Alÿs: the Museum of Modern Art, New York in collaboration with the Public Art Fund, June 29-September 16, 2002" *The Museum of Modern Art*, 2017: https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_151_300176691.pdf

⁴⁰ Montgomery, "Project 76", 3

Chapter 2: Religion and *The Modern Procession*

On first sight, a connection between *the Modern Procession* and religion is not hard to find; only look at the name of the performance. When the word “procession” falls, people will sooner think of a religious rather than a festive display. However, it would be too hasty to mark that comparison as truth. Therefore, I want to study *the Modern Procession* this chapter in the context of definitions of religious processions. How similar is the procession of the MoMA to a religious one? To answer this question, I first will define the nature of a religious procession itself.

Secondly, how does the environment affect the nature of a religious procession? For *the Modern Procession* took place on the streets of New York, a city with a long history. Has this setting affected religious processions that took and are taken place here? And in that line, does the environment affect *the Modern Procession* as well? By using the theories of art historian Edward Muir, theologian Margot Fassler, and the research done by historian Robert Orsi into religious processions taking place in New York City, I will answer my research question.

2.1 Religious rituals and processions

I will start at the beginning: what exactly is a procession? Following the definition of art historian Edward Muir, a procession at its core is an act or performance connected to a festive, religious, or political goal: celebrating a (military) victory for example, or the church showing the relics of an important saint to the public. However, a procession is just one of the many shapes a ritual can take. Defining a ritual is hard, because they are acts connected to something difficult to measure: emotions and emotional responses.⁴¹ Emotions exist only ‘in the moment’ when the ritual takes place; when they are analyzed at a later date, ritual lacks that emotional fulfilment and feels empty.

Apart from emotions, it is the *repetition* of the act that give a ritual meaning; seeing every young boy read the Torah made it an essential part of the Bar Mitswa ceremony. It is that combination of a repeated act and the emotions that the act conjures, that gives a ritual its power: you cannot see one element apart from another.⁴²

Most theorists therefore classify a ritual as an action that is institutionalized, repeated, and agreed upon by a collective group. Yet this definition leaves open a wide range of possibilities of actions that can be called a ritual. More narrowed down is the definition of French socialist Emile Durkheim, described in Muir’s book:

For Durkheim, worship of a god is the symbolic means by which people worship their own society, their own mutual dependency. Thus, the sacred ultimately refers not to a supernatural entity, but rather to people’s emotionally charged interdependence, their societal arrangements. What is important about rituals, then, is not that they deal with

⁴¹ Edward Muir, “Introduction: what is a ritual?” *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1997), 2

⁴² Muir, “Introduction: what is a ritual?”, 3

*supernatural beings, but rather that they provide a powerful way in which people's social dependence can be expressed.*⁴³

In this sense, a (public) ritual has more social weight than a religious one; the ritual brings group coherence. Even in a society where different groups do not cooperate or have different (religions) opinions, a ritual can bring this cohesion. Following the idea of Durkheim, Muir argues that it is the function of a ritual not to show the universal truth, but to show a leading guideline that people can follow.⁴⁴

However, knowing what a ritual does still leaves open a wide range of different kinds. Muir pays special attention to making the distinction between rituals that “model” and rituals that “mirror”.⁴⁵ The difference lies in the message that a ritual brings to its public. A model ritual presents a standard miniature for society to follow: when churchgoers shake hands after the service and share food among each other, this acts as a model of goodwill for people to follow in their own life. A mirror ritual however, presents the world as it is understood to be. They have a declarative character: *she* is my wife in this wedding, *I* am the king in this coronation. Rituals like these make statements and present persons or things to the world. Unlike the model ritual, they do not offer a way or alternative for society to follow.

How does *the Modern Procession* fit into these definitions of a ritual? On first sight, you would say not at all, for *the Modern Procession* is an act only performed once, and so would not have the emotional weight of a repeated act. The procession might carry emotional weight, but that is hard to measure. Neither could you say *the Modern Procession* follows Muir's definition of showing the public a guideline to follow. The Museum of Modern Art did not organize the procession in the hope that other museums would follow its example.

On the other hand, *the Modern Procession* could count as a mirror ritual. The procession shows to the citizens of New York part of the MoMA's collection; a museum part of New York City, and so part of its citizens too. Similar to the city's landscape, which changes and moves, *the Modern Procession* shows how a museum's collection can also move, and so how it is more connected to New York than people might think. This connection to the city will return later in the chapter.

2.2. The nature of a religious procession

Although *the Modern Procession* is hard to call a ritual, I do want to compare *the Modern Procession* to a certain type of ritual: a procession. To do so, I will use the criteria of Margot Fassler, professor of theology and liturgical studies at Cornwall University. According to her, a religious procession can be classified as such when it carries three different kinds of elements.⁴⁶ First, a procession, especially a devout or official one, attempts to enlighten viewers with tender spiritual or authoritarian influences. Durkheim already remarked on a

⁴³ David Kertzer, “Rituals, Politics, and Power.” Quoted in: Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 3

⁴⁴ Muir, “Introduction: what is a ritual?”, 4

⁴⁵ Muir, “Introduction: what is a ritual?”, 4-6

⁴⁶ Margot Fassler, “*Adventus* at Chartres: Ritual Models for major Processions.” Can be found in: Nicholas Howe, *Ceremonial Culture in Pre-Modern Europe*. (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 52-55

ritual's power of providing a guideline for people to follow; like a ritual, a procession too can be a leading example for society about what path to follow.

Second, the spectators of a procession are simultaneously being viewed by those who march in the procession. Compared to a ritual at the altar or a baptism at the front of the church, a procession through town blurs the line between the seeing subject and the seen object.⁴⁷ The gaze of the spectators is just as active as the gaze of the relic-barriers. One of the effects of this blurred distinction is that processions could be the source of social conflict; if the priest was not liked by the public, seeing him outside his church could lead to a public argument.

Third, while processions always are built around a definite plan, there is always the possibility to improvise.⁴⁸ If a certain street is under construction, a different route is decided upon. By changing a procession – even the smallest element – the meaning changes that the public takes home. Rituals and processions are a peculiar oxymoron: they are performances that always vary from one repetition to another, but that attempt to mask those variations by asserting their unchanging character. The style of dress made change from one wedding to another, but wedding ceremonies are always performed in the same way.

Following these three elements, *the Modern Procession* fits Fassler's definition. As mentioned above, showing the collection of the MoMA is the museum's way of reminding the citizens of New York that the museum's collection is part of their city, and so part of them. Moreover, seeing the reactions of the public in the first chapter, people did take notice of the procession, and so the participants of the procession probably took note of them too. As for the third element – the different reactions of the public - again the reactions of the public prove this: while the News Channel called *the Modern Procession* a 'moving day' for the museum, the mother was reminded of her childhood.⁴⁹

Apart from offering three 'basic' elements, Fassler also describes a general outline of a procession. All medieval or Renaissance processions, no matter how elaborate, derived from the archetypical religious processions in which spiritual specialists, like a priest, bishop, or confraternity member, carried a sacral object, such as a host, a relic, or a miraculous image.⁵⁰ The aim of this was to bring the object into the view of those who watched the procession.

The sacred object therefore takes pride of place in the visual center of the performance. A variation on this has processors walk by a sacral object, which remains in a fixed location. In other words, the procession can either reach a wider audience by moving a sacred object through the streets of the city, or the viewers might form a procession to pass by the sacred object while it stays in a fixed place.

In the case of *the Modern Procession*, we are dealing with the former. *The Modern Procession* moves through the streets of New York, coming to the citizens of New York instead of the citizens coming to it. We have a group of confraternity members or volunteers carrying the 'sacral objects' (here, the artworks), which take place of pride in the

⁴⁷ Fassler, "Adventus at Chartres: Ritual Models for major Processions", 53

⁴⁸ Fassler, "Adventus at Chartres", 54

⁴⁹ Transcript of WABC-TV (ABC) Channel Seven news segment, broadcasted on June 24, 2002, between 5:00 – 7:00 AM during the program *News*. Written down in: Alÿs, Francis. *Francis Alÿs: The Modern Procession*, 72

⁵⁰ Fassler, "Adventus at Chartres", 56-57

performance. To say that the artworks have the same power as a sacral object is a bridge too far, but carrying them similar to a sacred object could remind the public of religious processions they have seen in the past.

After having defined the basic form of a religious procession, I am in particular interested in the setting in which a religious procession takes place. Whether a procession is performed on the streets, in a church, or in an open field, affects its message in numerous ways. After all, since processions are so connected to the power of their sacred or political organizers, they likewise can affect the sense that most people have of their environment. By letting a ritual take place in a space that normally is the site of everyday life, transforms this space into a place of importance. Therefore, what is the connection between the streets of New York and the religious processions that are held there?

2.3 Case study: The Good Friday Procession of St. Brigid's parish

The city of New York is one with a rich demographic background.⁵¹ Since the city's foundation in 1626, this diverse population has been growing in the various neighborhoods of the ever-expanding city. The Museum of Modern Art is located in the Lower East side of Manhattan, in Midtown, while the temporary location of the museum is located in Long Island City, Queens. While the population of Manhattan – according to a 2012 survey – is largely white, Queens is the most ethnically diverse urban area of New York.⁵² All of these rich diverse backgrounds leave their mark on their neighborhood, and in turn, the celebrations and events that are organized there.

To better understand the connection between the urban environment and a religious procession that is held there, I will analyze the Good Friday procession of St. Brigid's parish, held in the Lower East Side, Manhattan. Historian Wayne Ashley researched this procession from the 1960's until the 1990's, to see how the procession changed through the years, who decided these changes, and why.

Since the 1960's, the St. Brigid's parish, situated on Manhattan's Lower East Side, annually performs an outdoor Stations of the Cross procession on Good Friday.⁵³ This religious and emotional procession is part of the Holy Week: a weeklong celebration that commemorates the last days of Christ's life.⁵⁴ The Week starts with Palm Sunday, remembering how Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem, Holy Thursday is dedicated to remembering the Last Supper of Jesus Christ with his Apostles, and Good Friday marks the day Jesus died on the cross.

⁵¹ In 2010, the city's population was estimated being 44% white, 23,6% Hispanics of any race, 18,5% black, 12,7% Asian and 0,7% Native American. Source: Robert Orsi, "Introduction – Crossing the City Line." *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape*. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999) 3

⁵² Here one fourth of the population is estimated white, while the rest is made up from Hispanic or Latino, Asian and people from a Black ethnicity. Source: Orsi, "Introduction – Crossing the City Line," 7-9

⁵³ Wayne Ashley, "The Stations of the Cross. Christ, Politics, and Processions on New York City's Lower East Side." *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape*. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999), 341

⁵⁴ Melissa Petruzzello, "Holy Week. Christianity." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, accessed May 14, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Holy-Week>

The ritual performed by St. Brigid's parish is the Stations of the Cross: a procession wherein fourteen incidents in Christ's journey across Jerusalem on his way to his crucifixion are remembered.⁵⁵ In the streets within the boundaries of St. Brigid's parish, participants enact each of the Stations in front of strategically chosen, extremely problematic areas: a street corner where drugs are sold, a park associated with danger and vice, etc.

In symbolically retracing Christ's journey through Jerusalem, participants in the procession shifted the biblical text to a visual reference located in their neighborhood. They allegorized particular places and made them resonate with Christ's journey. By parishioners attempting to invest these chosen places with a (religious) narrative and a "historical meaning", they turn them into monuments of collective value. As the procession makes its way through the neighborhood, two overlapping narratives emerge: one about Christ's suffering, the other about the suffering of the Lower East Village's residents. This decision, to bring the history of the neighborhood together with this heavy religious procession, is according to Wayne Ashley, an act of political power:

*St. Brigid's reworking of the Passion was not a subtle argument in political discourse; nor did it present complex plans for change. Rather, the clergy manipulated rhetorical strategies and religious symbols of the Passion for the purpose of creating new meanings that dramatized the difficult conditions of their parishioners' lives.*⁵⁶

Why did the clergy feel the need to 'manipulate rhetorical strategies' for the benefit of their parishioners? The reason lies in the history of the Lower East Village, which dates back to the beginning of the 17th century. From that moment until the end of the 20th century, the neighborhood housed a variety of ethnicities: immigrants from Ireland, Germany, Italy and Poland, and after World War II, Asians and Latinos followed. By the mid 1970s, there were so many Puerto Ricans living in the East Village that local residents dubbed the area *Loisaida* (low-ees-SIDE-ah), the Puerto Rican pronunciation for "Lower East Side."⁵⁷

Hoping to bridge the gap between the church and the diverse community, and include the large population of Puerto Ricans recently arrived in the neighborhood, the priests of St. Brigid's parish decided to add some changes to the parish.⁵⁸ A major one was the change of the Good Friday Procession. In Puerto Rico, outdoor processions were a common part of religious life, and the priests felt that such a celebration on the Lower East Side would help make the church more available and recognizable to its growing Puerto Rican population. Therefore, from 1967 on, the Good Friday Procession was staged outside. During the procession, the parishioners stopped at various places along a pre-established route, reciting traditional prayers, and staging social dramas connected to episodes in Christ's Passion. Although not all the parishioners agreed with this change – the script of the procession kept being altered from the 1960's until the 1990's - the Good Friday Procession did continue to be performed outside.

⁵⁵ Wayne, "The Stations of the Cross," 351-353

⁵⁶ Wayne, "The Stations of the Cross," 342

⁵⁷ Wayne, "The Stations of the Cross," 343-344

⁵⁸ Wayne, "The Stations of the Cross," 345

By doing this, the procession did not become a ritual organized by St. Brigid's parish and the people of the neighborhood, but a ritual of the street as well. The places or Stations that were chosen are normally symbols of addiction, abuse, and corruption. Examples of these Stations are health care centers, pharmacies, liquor stores, and abortion clinics. All these places are places where people experience and use their bodies, making them well-chosen places to reflect on the Passion of Christ. By making these places part of Christ's suffering – both 'bodies in need of healing and reflection' – gives the Stations, and so the street, almost a voice to speak out against these crimes.

Yet it is important to remember who created this voice. While the parishioners of the neighborhood help pick the Stations and performed the 'enactment' of Christ's Passion, it were the priests of St. Brigid's parish who linked the religious episode to political struggles they felt as important. In fact, many of the stops along the procession route were organizations that either sympathized with the clergy's political views or had collaborated with them on various causes.⁵⁹ While the procession succeeded in dramatizing important issues, it simultaneously colored this experience according to the (political) wishes of the clergy.

This analysis of the Good Friday Procession is a good example of how the urban environment can affect the shape of a procession, and how many different people can have a say in its shape. Not only that, but the Good Friday Procession proves itself not to be just a religious ritual remembering the Passion of Christ; it also carries a political message on how addiction can corrupt people. While not every parishioner appreciated this political message, the fact that the Good Friday Procession to this day continues to be performed outside, does imply that people agreed on bringing urban issues and religious stories together. How can the analysis of the Good Friday Procession help with understanding *the Modern Procession*? Before comparing the two, I must first properly analyze the latter.

2.4 *The Modern Procession: from Manhattan to Queens*

The Modern Procession was organized by three main actors: Harper Montgomery, curator at the Museum of Modern Art, Tom Eccles, director of the Public Art Fund, and artist Francis Alÿs. The Museum of Modern Art approached Francis Alÿs already in June 1999, asking if he wanted to organize a performance connected to the planned move of the museum's collection. Alÿs lived and worked in Mexico City since 1993, and after witnessing several religious processions there, proposed carrying artworks in a procession through New York to commemorate the MoMA's move. However, due to Montgomery forbidding the collection being brought outside due to safety measures, the idea of a procession came to a halt. Then, on September 9, 2011, the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers took place. A few weeks later, on September 29, Francis Alÿs sent the following email to Montgomery, writing:

Somehow, in this period of reflection and mourning, I feel more than ever that the procession, for its reverent nature and collective power, could be a most relevant

⁵⁹ Wayne, "The Stations of the Cross," 356-358

*vehicle for a public event in the streets of New York City. Shall we re-open the project?*⁶⁰

Seeing that the safety of the artworks proved to be an important issue, Alÿs brought up using replicas of the artworks instead of the real ones. After consulting Tom Eccles, director of The Public Art Fund, who promised to provide the funds for the replicas, the idea of the procession was given a green light, and the trio could start making a plan.

Alÿs' idea of the performance contained many elements of a traditional religious procession: a group of around 50 volunteers, escorted by police, and being led by a Latin American (preferably Mexican or Peruvian) band playing processional music. All the volunteers would be given a specific shirt illustrating his or her role within the procession. Rose petals were meant to be thrown, and if possible, some animals should be part of the procession too.⁶¹

Which modern artworks would be the center pieces of the procession was decided between Alÿs, Montgomery, and Eccles. Due to the fact that reproducing the artworks would take quite some time, certain choices were removed from the 'wish list', and in the end the decision fell on *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* by Picasso, *Standing Woman* by Giacometti, and *Bicycle Wheel* by

Duchamp.⁶² Each work was chosen for a specific reason: alongside Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, the Picasso painting is the most popular work among public visiting the MoMA, and so would be easily recognizable for the people on the street.⁶³ Moreover, it would inform people that the MoMA is connected to this special procession.

The choice for *Bicycle Wheel* was because Duchamp as an artist was strongly connected to



Figure 6: Francis Alÿs and the MoMA, *The Modern Procession*, (Focus: artist Kiki Smith and *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*), 2002.

⁶⁰ Email from Francis Alÿs to Harper Montgomery, send on September 29, 2001. Written down in: Alÿs, *Francis Alÿs: The Modern Procession*, 61

⁶¹ Eccles, "Outside Intervention: the making of the Modern Procession." *Francis Alÿs: The Modern Procession*. p. 11

⁶² On the 'wish list' were works like *Starry Night* by Van Gogh, *Bird in Space* by Brancusi, and *Abstraction Blue* by Georgia O'Keeffe. Source: Eccles, "The Candidates – Icons". *Francis Alÿs: The Modern Procession*. p. 55

⁶³ Francis Alÿs, Robert Storr, and Tom Eccles. "A conversation among Francis Alÿs, Robert Storr (the interviewer) and Tom Eccles (the director of the Public Art Fund)." Written down in: Alÿs, *Francis Alÿs: The Modern Procession*, 86

conceptual art and the MoMA. Also, the artwork asks the public “what is art?”, which is a question *the Modern Procession* similarly raises. *Standing Woman* was picked due to Giacometti being inspired by Egyptian procession figures, and so to use his work in a procession felt appropriate. Furthermore, Alÿs was attracted to the contrast between the perfect erect posture of the woman and the motion of the procession; “Giacometti’s *Walking Man* would have been a little redundant.”⁶⁴

The choice for Kiki Smith was based on Alÿs’ wish to show that the museum’s collection did not only include work by dead artists, but also by living ones; preferably an artist for whom performance art was an important part of his or her career. Of course, the height and the weight of the artist was an issue, for he or she was going to be carried through the streets for a long time. Kiki Smith was chosen because she was seen as a representation of a generational bridge: as the daughter of two artists, Smith had been part of the New York art world since childhood, and had grown up becoming an independent artist.⁶⁵

As for the route the procession would take, two things were already certain from the start: the procession would begin at the ‘old’ location of the Museum of Modern Art - 53rd Street, Manhattan – and end at the temporary new location at 33rd Street, Queens. The broad idea for the route was drawn as followed:

*In the drawings for the project, the procession was, in fact, literally written over the map of New York. There were just lines drawn on a page, but they proposed a long march up Sixth Avenue, across 57th street, up park Avenue, along 59th street, over the Queensboro Bridge, through the intersection of Queens Plaza, and finally through the long curve of Queens Boulevard (under the steel girders of the 7-train overpass) to MoMA’s new home. On paper, simple enough.*⁶⁶

The time that was estimated for the entire procession was around three hours, starting at 8.15 in the morning in front of the ‘old’ MoMA building.

Now that the main actors agreed on the plan, the chosen artworks, and the route, it was time to pick the other participants of the procession. Alÿs’ preference for a Mexican band to play the music was deliberate. Processions held in Mexico are often accompanied by a marching band to indicate the beat for the procession’s participants. It was therefore important not only to have Mexican musicians for *the Modern Procession*, but also to have carriers of the palanquins whom were used to walk to (for a long duration of time) on this marching beat. Asociación Tepeyac, the New-York based Mexican cultural center, was engaged to find people who had this experience.⁶⁷ Apart from Tepeyac, the priest of St. Brigid’s parish, Father Michael, helped find the Banda de Luis Cuervas marching band, who agreed to participate.

⁶⁴ Alÿs, Storr, and Eccles. “A conversation among Francis Alÿs...”, 87

⁶⁵ Apart from Smith, artists like Nam June Paik, Louise Bourgeois and Bruce Nauman were considered. Source: Eccles, “Outside Intervention,” 14

⁶⁶ Eccles, “Outside Intervention,” 11

⁶⁷ *The Tepeyac Association is a non-profit 501 (c) 3 network of 40 community based organizations, whose mission is two-fold: to promote the social welfare, and human rights of Latino immigrants, specifically the undocumented in New York City.* Source: VolunteerMatch. “Asociacion Tepeyac de

The other volunteers were invited by members of the museum through word of mouth. However, Alÿs, Eccles, and Montgomery did wish to keep the group diverse. The first concept for the group of volunteers consisted of 95% white women, and to the team, that group did not represent the city in any form.⁶⁸ Where the procession itself was an illustration of the museum's modern collection, it should also be an embodiment of New York's diverse



Figure 7: Francis Alÿs and the MoMA, *The Modern Procession*, (Focus: Brancusi's *Standing Woman*), 2002

population. In the end, the complete group consisted of 100 volunteers from different nationalities, all wearing the same outfit: black pants and a white blouse, with the words "The Modern Procession" on the back. As a last element, a horse was found in Jamaica Bay Riding Academy, Brooklyn, who could handle the streets of Manhattan.⁶⁹

The set-up of the procession began with the horse walking at the head, followed by the first artwork: *Bicycle Wheel* by Duchamp.⁷⁰ Behind this palanquin walked the Peruvian band playing music, followed by *Standing Woman* by Giacometti. Behind Giacometti came the artist Kiki Smith, carried on a palanquin, and after her *Les Femmes d'Alger*. Escorting the end of the procession was a police car. Between the band and the palanquin carriers, walked the volunteers throwing rose petals, blowing soap bubbles, and waving flags.

The date of the procession itself - June 23, 2002 - fell on a Sunday, which was a day chosen on purpose. In an interview with Tom Eccles and Francis Alÿs about *The Modern Procession*, Eccles said:

The fact that it was a Sunday morning was actually kind of symbolic. It gave it a tone and a character and a connection to ritualistic activities, religious activities. That was kind of understated but was definitely present. We didn't do it on a Thursday afternoon. It was timed specifically not to be when art-world events happen.

Interviewer: Was anybody uncomfortable with the religious connotations or religious framework?

New York." VolunteerMatch, accessed 14 May, 2019,

<https://www.volunteermatch.org/search/org75509.jsp>

⁶⁸ Alÿs, Storr, and Eccles. "A conversation among Francis Alÿs...", 92

⁶⁹ Eccles, "Outside Intervention: the making of the Modern Procession", 14-15

⁷⁰ Alÿs, "The Way it Happened," *Francis Alÿs: The Modern Procession*, 72-73

Francis Alÿs: No, I think the reverential nature of the event was always obvious. And the beauty of the palanquins somehow protected that dimension.

*Tom Eccles: I think it is also important that we didn't make a spectacle out of this. I mean, it had spectacular possibilities, but it was never going to be this enormous public event with a corporate sponsor.*⁷¹

Now, looking at the organizers of *the Modern Procession*, the design of the procession, the volunteers (and their background), and the choices about the route and the day for the performance, what can be said about *the Modern Procession* from a religious standpoint? Although the similarities between a ritual and *the Modern Procession* are hard to draw, a comparison between *the Modern Procession* and Margot Fassler's definition of a religious procession can be made.

Furthermore, the organizers of *the Modern Procession* had an image of a religious procession in mind while setting the performance up. Although it was Alÿs who was inspired by religious processions he witnessed in the past, Tom Eccles and Harper Montgomery made no arguments against the idea of a procession, on the condition of using replicas instead of the real artworks. Tom Eccles even admitted that it was that religious overtone that made the performance so fascinating to him.⁷² Harper Montgomery later described the procession as "encouraging us to look both critically and fondly at our attachments to icons, reminding us of the quasi-religious status modern art can acquire, even in our contemporary New York lives."⁷³

Next to that, it was important for the leading trio that the other participants of the procession had experience with religious processions. Not just for the safety of the artworks – since trained carriers know how icons 'react' to the movement of a procession – but also to make the procession feel more authentic. Untrained carriers would probably have more trouble carrying the artworks for three hours. It is also interesting that a church - St. Brigid's parish even - was sought to help find these experienced carriers. Lastly, Eccles and Alÿs confirmed that the day – Sunday – was chosen to give *the Modern Procession* a religious undertone.

Yet I hesitate to compare the Good Friday Procession of St. Brigid's parish with *the Modern Procession*. Yes, *the Modern Procession*, like the Good Friday Procession, is inspired by its setting: both processions reflect the rich demographic of its environment. Puerto Rican history changed the Good Friday Procession, and the group of volunteers for *the Modern Procession* was mixed to reflect the diverse population of the city.

⁷¹ Alÿs, Storr, and Eccles. "A conversation among Francis Alÿs, Robert Storr (the interviewer) and Tom Eccles (the director of the Public Art Fund)." *Francis Alÿs: the Modern Procession*, 93

⁷² "What I think is interesting was that the procession had a kind of religious overtone, an explicitly religious overtone. And we were dealing with, essentially, a structure not dissimilar from the Catholic Church, with the cardinals, bishops, down to the village priests. And every church has its Martin Luthers!" Quote from: Alÿs, "A conversation among Francis Alÿs, Robert Storr (the interviewer) and Tom Eccles (the director of the Public Art Fund)." *The Modern Procession*, 81

⁷³ Harper Montgomery, "A Mythologist at work," *Francis Alÿs: The Modern Procession*, 142

Yet the Good Friday Procession is much more socially engaged with its parishioners than *the Modern Procession* was with its volunteers. Although it is always performed outside, the Stations visited during the Good Friday Procession change every year. The priests of St. Brigid's parish have a stronger voice, but they do discuss the set-up of the procession with their parishioners. *The Modern Procession* on the other hand is much more elite: shaped and set-up by a trio of art professionals. The volunteers, the musicians, and the palanquin carriers are all told what role to play; they do not have any say in it. Although Montgomery, Alÿs, and Eccles try to be socially engaging, *the Modern Procession* feels as if it is made for the neighborhood of Manhattan and Queens, instead of *with* Manhattan and Queens. The Museum of Modern Art stays in its 'ivory tower', even when it is taken the streets.

This is a pity, because looking at Alÿs' lines in his email on September 29, the artist does seem inspired to organize

a socially engaging performance. Alÿs believes the procession 'for its reverent nature and collective power' could be 'a relevant vehicle' to mourn and reflect on the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers; however, I have found no proof that *the Modern Procession* has a function like this. There is the possibility that the participants of the procession could have seen the missing Twin Towers while crossing the



Figure 8: Francis Alÿs and the MoMA, *The Modern Procession* crossing the Queensboro Bridge, 2002.

Queensboro Bridge. However, I have found no source confirming any link between *the Modern Procession* and the terrorist attack, and so I have to conclude that (the memory of) 9/11 played no role in the performance.

So, what are we left with now? Compared to the definition of a religious procession, *The Modern Procession* is quite alike, but when it comes to relating to society, *the Modern Procession* comes up a bit empty. At the end of Chapter One, I concluded that *the Modern Procession* fits the definition of an art performance, yet the lack of eye-witnesses leaves me unable to say if the performance hit its mark in raising questions about art. However, although I do not know how people reacted to *the Modern Procession*, they must have had a reaction seeing the artworks of the MoMA on the streets instead of being displayed inside the museum. How does this change in place make you look at art with different eyes? This question I will answer in Chapter Three.

Chapter 3: The Modern Procession: a different place & a new connection

With each chapter, we have delved deeper into *the Modern Procession*. Where I first started by placing *the Modern Procession* in line with performance art of the 1960's, in the second chapter I looked at the Procession from a religious standpoint. In this third chapter however, I want to analyze *the Modern Procession* from an anthropological, and social geographical perspective. In the light of these theories, I will take a closer look at the 'main elements' of the procession: the artworks of the MoMA. *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. M.)* by Picasso, *Standing Woman* by Brancusi, and *Bicycle Wheel* by Duchamp normally are displayed inside one of the most well-known museums of New York. Here, each artwork is presented in clean, lighted rooms, allowing the audience to observe the work in peace.

During *the Modern Procession* however, this whole set-up is changed. The artworks are now being shown on the streets of New York as part of a procession, and are accompanied by a brass band, and a large group of volunteers. Instead of a peaceful environment, there is music, movement, and little time to observe the works before they are carried away. These works are not the real artworks, but the public does not know they are looking at replicas. They suddenly see art – familiar art – being presented in a completely unfamiliar way, which strongly changes how people see and take in the works.

But how does this effect our connection to the artworks exactly? I hope to gain a better understanding of this by first analyzing *the Modern Procession* from an anthropological standpoint. Hereby I will be using the ideas of art historian Hans Belting, whose books *Likeness and Presence* (1994) and *The Anthropology of Images* (2011) delve deeper into the image of art and how the public receives those images. Since the reception of art outside on the street is so different from watching it inside a museum, I believe Belting can help me understand that difference.

Apart from Belting, I also want to learn how the place of presenting art effects the work, since the place or space of *the Modern Procession* is such a unique one. To explain this role of place, I will use the ideas of social geographer Yi-Fu Tuan. By analyzing *the Modern Procession* following the theories by these two scholars, I hope to answer this part of my research question: what happens during *the Modern Procession* to the modern artworks once they are taken out of the museum and carried around in a procession?

3.1 Hans Belting: the image, the medium, and the body

The Modern Procession is built around the works that it carries: the replicas of *Bicycle Wheel* by Duchamp, *Standing Woman* by Giacometti, and *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. M.)* by Picasso. Artist Kiki Smith is the fourth 'artwork', but I want to focus first on the non-living works. What exactly are this bronze statue, the metal wheel, and the painted canvas? Following the anthropological ideas of art historian Hans Belting, these artworks are 'images given shape'. An artist had an image in his own mind, and with the aid of materials, changed his internal image into an external one. Hereby, as Belting writes, the work of art becomes "a tangible object with a history; an object that can be classified, dated, and exhibited. An image, on the other hand, defies such attempts of reification, even to the extent that it often straddles the

boundary between physical and mental existence. It may live in a work of art, but the image doesn't necessarily coincide with the work of art."⁷⁴

This idea of image plays a larger role in what Belting describes as the triangle of image-medium-body.⁷⁵ It is this triangle that allows one to understand and study the connection between the public and art. By dividing this connection in three elements, it allows us to gain a better understanding of the elements separately, and how they work together.

An artwork begins with an image, an external idea that is made visible by art.⁷⁶ Not only that, but thanks to art an artist's personal image enters the public space, making it possible for everyone to see the image and make his or her own connection to it. The shape of art - whether it is a photograph, a statue, a painting - that allows the connection between the public and the image, is what Belting calls a medium.⁷⁷ The medium functions as a support, host, and tool for the image, yet it is not something that immediately stands out as a separate tool. The image and the medium are so closely combined that we often do not notice the medium: if you ask people what they are looking at when they look at the *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, they would describe the image. The fact that it is a painting, that it is made of canvas, and normally hung on the wall to be displayed, is not so important that it stands out to people.

Yet the medium itself plays a much bigger role in the connection between the image and the public than people might think. According to Belting, the function of an image is to make something present which is actually absent.⁷⁸ The image itself is present to our gaze, but that is thanks to the medium in which the image appears. For example, an image of the Virgin Mary means that, although Virgin Mary herself is not present in the church, one can worship a statue of her instead. A piece of wood, a photograph, or a statue: the medium gives the only presence that is possible of an image's absence.

One could argue that especially with modern or abstract art, it is hard to distinguish what exactly the image is. Artists themselves often are unclear or refuse to answer what image they themselves had in mind, or what their work is supposed to represent. Is the *Bicycle Wheel* actually showing us a bicycle wheel? Yet I believe whether the image is abstract or concrete is not important; what is important is if the medium allows the image to connect with the public.

The public is the third element of Belting's triangle, which he calls the body.⁷⁹ Where, without a medium, the exchange of an image between the artist and the public is difficult - two people can never have the same image in their head - thanks to a medium, the public sees exactly what kind of image the artist had in mind. Now the public can form their own connection with the image, and thereby making the image stick longer in their mind and memory.

Although we have only a few reviews of *the Modern Procession* in New York, one may expect that everyone's experience of *the Modern Procession* was different, and remembers it

⁷⁴ Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images. Pictures, Medium, Body*, translated by Thomas Dunlap, Princeton (Princeton University Press, 2011), 2

⁷⁵ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 4-8

⁷⁶ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 4-5

⁷⁷ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 5-6

⁷⁸ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 7

⁷⁹ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 8

differently. This is not strange, for memory itself, according to Belting, also is a body experience.⁸⁰ Memory generates images of absent events, or images of people from another time and place. Memory is constantly making connections with the present world, and a person's memory would certainly be active watching *the Modern Procession*. Elements like the brass band's music, for example, could enable people to remember their favorite artist, while the procession itself might take people back of processions they witnessed in the past.

3.2 The Modern Procession: the image, the medium, and the body

However, while initially the theory of Belting seemed easily applicable, in reality it appeared to be quite hard. In the case of the artworks being presented in the Museum of Modern Art, detecting the image, the medium, and the body is quite easy. Taking *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* as an example: the image consists of four abstract women, the medium is the canvas whereon the image is printed, and the body is the public of the MoMA.

Detecting Belting's three elements in *the Modern Procession* is more complicated. The image of the artworks now is accompanied by the image that Alÿs, Montgomery, and Eccles created of the *Modern Procession*; with the musicians, volunteers, and even a horse. Due to this choice, the shape of the medium also changes. The artworks themselves certainly are not removed from their frame or pedestal, but now a group of carriers is added who raise these artworks high. One could even say that all the participants of *the Modern Procession* become part of the artwork's medium. Moreover, all those participants form the medium of *the Modern Procession* as well. Lastly, these double images and mediums give the body (the public) quite something to take in. People on the streets now have to connect in both the carried artworks as well as the performance.

However, is the fact that the public has to take in two images and two kinds of mediums a problem? When it comes to the images, I believe this is not the case. Although the public has to connect with two kinds of images, the artworks are carried high above the participants of the procession; the works get more room to be visible.⁸¹ While the person on the street will not be able to take in the whole procession at once, you should be able to clearly see Giacometti's *Standing Woman*. There is a hidden hierarchy to *the Modern Procession* that evaluates the MoMA art above the performance art. The procession's volunteers ask the public to pay attention to (the image of) the artworks first.

The medium, however, is a problem; mainly because its shape is so hard to define. First, where the medium of the MoMA's artworks does not change – wood is lifeless - the medium of *the Modern Procession* is alive. All the participants of the procession – human and animal – are part of the medium. Secondly, all those participants are constantly on the move, and so the medium constantly changes shape as well. A third problem is that the participants of the medium will try to connect with the public watching *the Modern Procession*. It brings to mind

⁸⁰ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 11

⁸¹ Alÿs, "The Way it Happened." *Francis Alÿs: The Modern Procession*, 72-73

Margot Fassler's argument, on how the spectators of a religious procession are simultaneously being viewed by those who march in the procession.⁸²

With all these difficulties, how should we try to understand the medium: keeping the medium of the procession and the artworks apart, or together? I believe the latter is the best option: the artworks are carried high so that the audience can better see the images, but they are carried by the participants of the procession. The size of *the Modern Procession* is much bigger than the size of a bronze statue, and so would easier catch the eye of the public. Therefore, I say that the medium of MoMA's artworks – despite being raised high – takes a backseat, so to speak, in favor of *the Modern Procession's* medium.

In that light, we can say that within this one medium, two sources or voices try to connect with the public: the artworks of the MoMA's, and *the Modern Procession*. How can we examine these voices? In Hans Belting's book, I found a different type of artwork that helped me understand mediums with more than one 'voice'. In the 13th and 14th century, it was tradition among Western nobility to have portraits being made of them; portraits not just showing individual people, but rather the family's coats of arms. Both these images – the coat of arms and the person's portrait – can be described, according to Belting, as “media of the body”, in the sense that they represent the body of an individual.⁸³

However, these paintings illustrate different conceptions of the body: the coat of arms the genealogical one, the portrait the individual body. Yet that portrait of a nobleman carries the social rank derived from its genealogical heritage. Therefore, one could say that the portraits shows “two bodies”: the collective body of the family-line, and the natural body of the living person.⁸⁴ On top of that, the nobleman's portrait is in possession of a *gaze*, hereby giving the portrait more agency than the coat of arms. The painted body, carrying the genealogical body within itself, can return the gaze of the public and so bring itself more to life, than a coat of arms ever could.

Just as the nobleman's portrait carries two kinds of “bodies” within itself, *the Modern Procession* does the same. As a medium, the procession carries two bodies within itself: it carries literally the artworks of the museum, while at the same time celebrates the museum. Both the performance and the artworks are a representation of the Museum of Modern Art: the artworks represent the MoMA's collection, while the performance represents the museum itself and its influence in the museum world. The Museum of Modern Art was one of the first museums dedicated to modern art, having works from famous artists like Picasso, Dalí, and Pollock in its collection. Both these voices – of the collection and of the museum - come together in the medium of *the Modern Procession*. And just like a nobleman's portrait, this medium has a *gaze*: the gaze of the participants. Coming back to the idea of Margot Fassler, the gaze of the participants of *the Modern Procession* towards the public is just as active as the gaze of a painted nobleman.

With this understanding of *the Modern Procession* and her non-living artworks, I want to return to Kiki Smith. How can we understand her on the basis of Belting's theory?

⁸² Fassler, “*Adventus* at Chartres: Ritual Models for major Processions.” Can be found in: Howe, Nicholas, *Ceremonial Culture in Pre-Modern Europe*. (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 53

⁸³ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 63

⁸⁴ Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 66

While it is true that the public will recognize Smith as human and therefore have a different connection with her than with the non-living artworks, However, Smith is not acting 'human'. She is sitting still on the palanquin, looking straight ahead, never once making eye contact with the public. You could almost say she is acting like an image. But an image of what? As mentioned in Chapter Two, Alÿs picked Kiki Smith because she and her oeuvre are the symbol of a living artist, whose work is part of MoMA's collection.⁸⁵ In my opinion, Smith can therefore be seen as the image of that thought.

This complex analysis, following the theory of Hans Belting, is necessarily to understand what makes *the Modern Procession* so unique. In religious processions, the public is often so educated that they cannot see a religious image for what it really is. It is not just an image of a bleeding man hanging on a cross: people will immediately classify it as Jesus Christ. Thanks to this precognition, the connection between 'image-medium-body' becomes (too) colored. When it comes to performance art, Belting's triangle is complicated because the image and the medium often come together in one person: the artist performing. Wim T. Schippers for example, with his *Mars door Amsterdam*, is the medium and the image in one, asking the citizens of Amsterdam to connect with him.⁸⁶

In *the Modern Procession*, the image and the medium are separate tools, and while the body of the public could recognize the carried artworks, the unique way of presenting them stops the connection from being too colored. Hanging in the MoMA *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* is presented as part of the museum's collection, but outside on the streets, the painting is on its own. In fact, it are these streets that make *the Modern Procession* so special: not just in how different the location is from the MoMA, but also by the power that the streets themselves have. By presenting the artworks here, the works are given a different meaning than when they are displayed inside a museum. How can a change in place have such a large influence on art?

3.3 Yi-Fu Tuan: the role of space and place

Apart from the idea of the body, the medium, and the image, one has to consider the role of space as well. Earlier in the chapter I mentioned the difference in presentation of the artworks; where normally the artworks are standing still inside a museum, during the Procession they are moved through the streets of New York. This change in space and place influence the image of art, the medium, and therefore the connection with the body, much more than we might expect.

Yi-Fu Tuan, one of the key figures in the field of human geography and humanistic geography, has written about this connection between space, place and experience. Humanistic geography is the social study of the relationship between humans and their environment. How do human interactions and relationships change or influence the space and place that people live in?

⁸⁵ Eccles, "Outside Intervention: the making of the Modern Procession", *Francis Alÿs: The Modern Procession*, 14

⁸⁶ Ruhé, *The Best of Wim T. Schippers*, 54-56

In his book, *Space and Place*, Tuan explains the terms as “space being the more abstract term, which can become a place once we get to know it better.”⁸⁷ However, once a place is familiar, the concept of space does not disappear: we know a place is a place by the security and familiarity it offers, and how this is different from the openness and freedom of space.⁸⁸ The house I live in is different from the house that my neighbor lives in: I realize the difference in space due to familiarity. Becoming familiar with a place is done by experience; either directly and intimate, or indirectly and conceptual. We know our home intimately and directly; we only know our country indirectly by looking at a map. Whether direct or indirect, it is always with the use of our senses that experience is achieved. Thanks to seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and feeling we learn about the world. Therefore, our reality is a construct of experience, a creation of thought and feeling.⁸⁹

These concepts of space, place, and experience play a key role in how we experience *the Modern Procession*. Both the places where we experience the artworks – inside the MoMA or on the streets of New York – are namely, as Tuan calls them, manmade places. Such places have not only been developed, build, and maintained by humans, but they influence human perception and behavior. They are places made by men, but the places also *make* men. Buildings – from a public library to a royal palace – teach us who we are and how we ought to behave in that environment.⁹⁰ You behave differently once you are inside a palace, then when you are in the library. Manmade buildings symbolize human relationships and social roles that we have taught ourselves.

What does the building of MoMA tell us? A wide range of information: how much space humans are willing to give to art, what kind of impression the building should have according to its owners, how much the MoMA is a central part of the city by being built in the middle of town, instead of on the outskirts, etc. All these lessons, taught directly or indirectly, color how we experience and value the art displayed in the museum.

Likewise, the streets of New York teach us lessons. The streets of New York show us its geographic history, the town’s diverse demography, the changing and growing communities, etc. These lessons are perhaps harder to notice compared to a single building, but similar to the MoMA, the streets show people what it means to be part of the New York City. By performing *the Modern Procession* in this place, the history of MoMA’s collection blends with the history of the streets.

3.4 The “Spirit” of the Museum of Modern Art

Unfortunately, I cannot mark that last sentence as truth, for I have no information from witnesses of *the Modern Procession*: I cannot say with certainty how someone experienced the performance and what they learned from it. Yet all our experiences are subjective and colored. Even if we do not know how the experience of the *Modern Procession* is colored, we can accept that it happens. Whether we are standing outside on the streets or inside a building, manmade architecture still colors our view.

⁸⁷ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minnesota (University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6

⁸⁸ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 6-7

⁸⁹ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 8-9

⁹⁰ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 102

Although, manmade architecture is not the right word for the museum building of the MoMA. In his publications, Tuan elaborates on the differences between truly manmade architecture and the architecture of the last 100 years.⁹¹ Although the distinction is difficult to grasp – is not all architecture made by men? – we have to understand the term as ‘architecture that makes men who they are’. Architecture in the past did this by letting the whole community come together to design, construct, and maintain public buildings.

Nowadays however, it is just a small group of people who do this. Buildings and houses are now designed by an architect, constructed by a group of workmen, and maintained by another group; the largest part of society has little connection to the building itself. Because of this weak connection, the architecture of today does not ‘make’ men anymore: it does not educate people about social roles as it used to do in the past. People do not look at architecture for (social) guidance anymore, and so their awareness of a building diminishes. Architecture is just architecture.

This notion of people being aware of a building, brought the theories of Hans Belting to my mind, that he describes in his book *Likeness and Presence*. In this book, Belting looks at religious imagery and iconography, and how through time the meaning given to religious icons has changed. Where first icons only carried a religious meaning, in time they came to symbolize political or artistic views as well. In fact, icons symbolize something even bigger: they are a manifestation of the true spirit, and able to reenact theological events in an inspiring way.⁹² For example: by letting the statue of Virgin Mary enter the church during a religious procession, it feels as if Mary’s spirit has been brought inside the church too.

Although one cannot compare the Museum of Modern Art to a church, I do wonder how much people are actually aware of the museum’s building. The museum is not build or maintained by the community: only a few citizens of New York are strongly connected to the place. People are even less connected to the temporary building of the MoMA, which was recently constructed and not part of the city’s landscape as long as the MoMA’s building in Manhattan.⁹³

These two museum buildings play an important role in *the Modern Procession*, as they are the starting and ending point of the performance. In fact, the procession was organized because the curators of the museum wished to commemorate the collection’s move from one building to a temporary one.⁹⁴ Not only would the public be unaware of this temporary building, but it also, according to Tuan, would not teach the public much: the building is new and lacking in influence.

However, the MoMA did want the public to become aware of their new building and its (temporary) role as a museum. Therefore, they decided to visibly show the public what the role of the new building is, with the help of *the Modern Procession*. The artworks part of that performance are, following Belting’s idea, in the possession of a spirit: not a religious spirit,

⁹¹ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 112-114

⁹² Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 263

⁹³ Eccles, “Outside Intervention: the making of the Modern Procession”, *Francis Alÿs: The Modern Procession*, 10

⁹⁴ Eccles, “Outside Intervention: the making of the Modern Procession,” 8-9

but the spirit of the MoMA. By carrying the artworks from the old building to a new one, the temporary building, first ‘devoid’ of awareness and influence, becomes truly ‘spirited’ as the artworks are brought inside.

This conclusion might be too colored by religious ideas, but I believe it fits with the wish of the MoMA’s curators. The MoMA had set up a whole program of PR events to inform the public that its collection would be temporarily housed in Queens: fireworks at the building’s opening, free admission to MoMA QNS, etc.⁹⁵ Yet *the Modern Procession* was not part of that program: nothing in the procession signifies it as a performance coordinated by the MoMA. *The Modern Procession* truly was organized to make the move of the museum’s collection visible. Moreover, moving the collection did not just brought the spirit to the new building, but ‘awakened’ the spirit of the collection itself too. By changing its presentation so completely, the public gets to experience modern art in a new way. The connection is made anew.

However, there is one big difference between the way Belting’s triangle of image-medium-body works inside the Museum of Modern Art, and works outside of it. Inside the museum, the public connects with the individual artworks. Outside the museum, the public connects with the museum. The artworks might be the carriers of the museum’s spirit, but they are just a tool used in *the Modern Procession* to illuminate the Museum of Modern Art – no matter in what building the artworks stand. That the MoMA wants the public to connect to itself is not a bad thing, but it feels quite elitist to me.

In Chapter Two, I concluded that *the Modern Procession* is not as socially engaged with the city and its citizens as it hoped to be. At the end of this chapter, I have to conclude that the social engagement between *the Modern Procession* and the public is narrow too. *The Modern Procession* does not actively ask its public to rethink ideas about art (as performance art does), it does not provide a mirror to let people see society in a new light (as religious processions do): it simply wants people to see the Museum of Modern Art in a new light.

This brings me back to my research question: what happens to the modern artworks once they taken out of the museum and carried around in a procession? The answer to this is found thanks to Tuan’s social geographical theory, and Belting’s image-medium-body triangle. The image of the artworks is joined with the image of *the Modern Procession*, yet due to the hierarchy of the procession, the image of the artworks is given priority. The medium of *the Modern Procession* carries two voices: the voice of the individual artworks, and the voice of the Museum of Modern Art. However, since the size of *the Modern Procession* is larger than the individual artworks, the voice of the Museum of Modern Art is louder and more heard. The body, the public, therefore connects the strongest with the MoMA during *the Modern Procession*; the artworks are just a tool to enable this connection.

However, it are these artworks that actually carry the “spirit” of the Museum of Modern Art. This is what *the Modern Procession* makes clear: by moving the artworks from a new building into a new one, it is not so much the collection that is moving, but the Museum of

⁹⁵ Tanya Lewis, “ORGANIZATION CASE STUDY: MoMA relocation focuses on community commitment,” *PR Week*, published on October 21, 2002: <https://www.prweek.com/article/1233297/organization-case-study-moma-relocation-focuses-community-commitment>

Modern Art itself. In whatever place or building it resides is not important: where this collection is displayed, there is the MoMA.

Conclusion: the museum, the procession, and the city

At the end of my thesis, I return to my research question: What happens during *the Modern Procession*, organized by artist Francis Alÿs and the MoMA, to the modern artworks once they are taken out of the museum and carried around in a procession? How can *the Modern Procession* be understood from the perspective of definitions of religious processions, as an art performance, and from an anthropological and social geographical perspective?

With the help of my sub-questions, I have found the answers to understand *the Modern Procession*. In Chapter One, I analyzed the procession from the perspective of art performance to understand if *the Modern Procession* can be called such. Based on the definitions of RoseLee Goldberg, and the theory of Claire Bishop, I identify *the Modern Procession* as a delegated art performance. Similar to other art performances, the aim of *the Modern Procession* is the same: to stimulate people to rethink old ideas about art and how it is supposed to look.

However, where other performances were organized and performed only by the artist, *the Modern Procession* is performed by a group of volunteers. The artist Francis Alÿs is part of that group, but he is lost in the crowd carrying the artworks of the MoMA through the streets of New York. The streets are a fascinating place not just for Francis Alÿs: Dutch performances artist Wim T. Schippers and Stanley Brouwn too made the streets their preferred place to perform. The streets are where one best can surprise people with an art performance, and to engage them in seeing and thinking about art in a new light.

In Chapter Two, I looked at *the Modern Procession* from a religious standpoint. Using the definition from Edward Muir about rituals, and the definition of Margot Fassler about religious processions, I conclude that *the Modern Procession* is quite similar to a religious procession. Many elements that make *the Modern Procession* – its performance on a Sunday, the processional music, the participants waving flags and rose petals – are elements present in other religious processions too.

Still, compared to the Good Friday Procession of St. Brigid's parish, *the Modern Procession* is not as socially engaged with its environment as the former. The Good Friday Procession is organized by several groups of the neighborhood working together; *the Modern Procession* is created by a small, elite group who orchestrated every move of the volunteers. Therefore, I will say that, although *the Modern Procession* in appearance is alike a religious procession, it is not one in its message. It is not providing a guideline for people to follow or a reflection on society. The message of *the Modern Procession* is for people to notice the new museum building, and persuade audiences to still visit the MoMA now that it is settled in Queens.

The part of my research question – what happens during *The Modern Procession* to the modern artworks once they are taken out of the museum and carried around in a procession? – I answered in chapter Three. Studying the procession through the lens of Hans Belting's anthropological theory about the "image-medium-body" triangle, I concluded that by carrying the artworks out of the museum and into the streets, the image, medium, and body of MoMA's artworks gets mixed with the image, medium, and body of *the Modern Procession*. Analyzing this mixture made it clear that *the Modern Procession* is in possession of two

voices: a voice of the artworks, that say something about the collection of the museum, while the voice of *the Modern Procession* talks about the Museum of Modern Art itself.

What the voice of *the Modern Procession* is saying becomes clear once we realize the destination of the procession: the new museum building of the MoMA. Compared to the old building in Manhattan, the Queens building is not one that people are 'aware off', according to Yi-Fu Tuan. However, by visible moving the museum's collection to Queens, the MoMA wants to create that awareness. Not by highlighting the building itself, but by highlighting the collection of the MoMA: it is namely this collection that carries the true spirit of the museum. Wherever that collection resides, that is where the museum truly is.

The broader significance of my research

During my research to *the Modern Procession*, I have not only learned more about the performance itself, but also about the connection between art, museums, and the public space. The art displayed inside the Museum of Modern Art is special, but is that because the works themselves are special, or because they are part of the MoMA's collection? By taking the collection outside and showing them on the streets, it becomes clear that it is the former. In fact, it is this collection that 'makes' the museum building: a new building like MoMA QNS is only a museum in name, not in power.

When you look at the museum world of today, this discovery is quite surprising. During the 21st century, a museum's design namely has become more and more important when it comes to attracting public. Think for example of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, the Louvre Abu Dhabi, or the Museum of Contemporary Art & Planning Exhibition in Shanghai. Instead of the art collection, the idea is growing that audiences first need to be charmed by the architecture of the museum.

The Modern Procession proves the opposite of this idea, by literally leaving the building behind and showing that it is the collection that forms the heart of the museum, not the building. Not only this, but the collection remains impressive outside the context of the museum. By being shown on the streets of New York, *the Modern Procession* enabled art to reach a wider (and more diverse) audience compared to being displayed inside a museum. This leaves me wondering what would happen if a similar kind of "Modern Procession" would be organized, wherein elements of religion, art history, and the public space find each other.

An example that comes to my mind is the Jherominus Bosch Parade of 2016, organized by the Noordbrabants Museum to celebrate the opening of the exhibition "Jheronimus Bosch – visions of a genius".⁹⁶ The parade began in the Cathedral Church of St. John, whereas a cast of figures and creatures – based on the paintings of Bosch – walked from the church to the Noordbrabants museum. Accompanied by music and songs, the strange creatures did not only bring the art of Bosch alive, but also brought it to the public watching on the streets. The Parade was festive of character rather than religious, but I do believe Den Bosch would be enthusiastic to organize a performance where art and religion are brought together: the city has quite a history of organizing both religious processions and parades.

Therefore, further research to *the Modern Procession* might not only be relevant to understand the performance of Alÿs and the MoMA better, but could also be beneficial for other museums hoping to renew their connection with the public. When art walks out of the museum and into town, new connections and new ideas about art are born.

⁹⁶ Omroep Brabant, "Koning opent tentoonstelling Jheronimus Bosch (King opens exhibition Jheronimus Bosch)", *Omroep Brabant*, published on Februari 12, 2016: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5boYUK7fjiY&t=49s>

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