

Property Regimes:

A Questionnaire on Collection Procedures and Structures at
the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst

By Eric Golo Stone

Eric Golo Stone is a writer and curator whose work emphasizes artistic methods of institutional critique. His writing has been published in Afterall, e-flux, Flash Art, October, and Texte zur Kunst. With Rhea Anastas, Charles Gaines, and Jamillah James he co-edited the book The Theater of Refusal: Black Art and Mainstream Criticism (Dancing Foxes, 2024), and he is editor of the book, Services Working Group (Fillip, 2022).

This text was commissioned by the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst in conjunction with the two-part exhibition *Accumulation – On Collecting, Growth and Excess* (first sequence 08.02. to 25.05.2025, second sequence 14.06. to 27.07.2025). Rather than reflecting back on the exhibition, this text puts forward a questionnaire to be utilized in an intra-institutional process of gathering responses from representatives of the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst who have decisional authority over the Museum's collection. The questionnaire actively engages with the current research, development, and forthcoming implementation of specific actual changes to the Museum's collection infrastructure and procedures, a process which exceeds the scope of the temporary exhibition, *Accumulation*.

As an editorial prompt, the questionnaire works with the respondents to build capacity—to develop a responsibility—for the questions it advances. Publishing this set of questions now, prior to fully realizing that capacity to respond, serves as a point of disclosure and accountability in anticipating behind-the-scenes work of transforming the organizational conduct and structural operations of the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst collection.

Socio-ontological reckonings with the perceived purpose and actual use of museum collections remain urgent today. Collecting museums are consequential localities where art is inseparable from juridical regimes of property ownership and attendant capital. That ownable property is fundamentally ensured by the state legal order, and that a central purpose of the state constitution is property enforcement, exemplifies how inextricably co-constitutive private holding and national security are.¹ Acquisitions are continuous with statecraft capitalism. The everyday settled expectation of property rights is a euphemism for the longstanding expulsions of the acquisitive state. New establishments that acquire recently produced property maintain the historical means of acquisition and the archaic conventions of ownership. Indeed, a contemporary museum that collects exclusively contemporary art must still contend with its participation in the exclusionary right inherent to the property regime. Property and finance in Switzerland are inextricable from colonial continuities.² Acknowledging these pervasive continuities means challenging the assumed historical exceptionalism of contemporary collecting museums, including the Migros

¹ The Swiss Federal Constitution guarantees the right to property (Art. 26).

² The Swiss National Museum (ed.), *colonial – Switzerland's Global Entanglements*. Scheidegger & Spiess, 2025.

Museum für Gegenwartskunst, by engaging them as direct beneficiaries of ongoing accumulation derived from colonial and neocolonial dealings.

An examination of the legal-economic structures supporting the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst collection inevitably considers the Migros Group as a multinational multi-subsidiary corporation, cooperative federation, and sole benefactor of the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst. Beyond merely exposing this legacy patronage of the Museum, what responsibility of action may be generated from audited disclosures of the beneficiary relations the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst has with the Migros Group? The integrated yet compartmentalized relations between the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst Collection, Federation of Migros Cooperatives, Migros Industry, and Migros Bank are an active evidentiary network of ownership within the global nexus of property. Leaning further into these evidentiary and beneficiary relations is a vital approach to any impactful reorganizing, repurposing, and redeploying of the Museum's collection infrastructure. An apparatus established by the destructive order of propertization and its capitalization can never be liberated, but that operative machinery of trauma is necessarily utilized in service of reparations.

Because reparations is an expansive project which includes redressing ownership and wealth redistribution while also necessarily exceeding these limited legal-economic frameworks, artistic capacities are crucial to realizing that expansive project's critical horizon. If art is significantly determined by its inseparability from the regime of property, how might art then determine the regime of property with inverse overriding force? That is, what artistic potential and social possibility can be made from that inseparability? The following questionnaire offers an interrogative occasion for the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst to reconsider its own practical administration role in that expansive project and in supporting artists' applied methods for its realization.

While this questionnaire is applicable to all representatives of the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, it was submitted to those representatives who identify as having assigned responsibility and decisional authority over the Museum's collection.

1) What assigned responsibilities and what decisional authority do you currently have over the collection of the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst? Does your fully executed employment contract stipulate in what specific ways you are authorized to make consequential decisions for the collection? Within your collective leadership team role, are you authorized to make changes to collection procedures and processes unilaterally, or do those changes require majority vote approval from all members of the leadership team? And then, does the leadership team require approval from a supervisory authority in making those changes? How are all members of the collective leadership team included in a process of making changes to collection procedures and structures? How are non-leadership collection-specific team members included in that process? How would you envision that authorized approval process if it were to be restructured? Beyond the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst team's role within the Culture Percentage of the Migros Group, is there any position in the wider Social Affairs and Culture Department of the Federation of Migros Cooperative and its Executive Board with direct decisional authority over the Museum collection? What legal entity ultimately owns the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst collection?

2) Have you sought any changes to acquisitions protocols and collection procedures since you began working at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst? Have you proposed any infrastructural changes to the collection, for instance regarding the physical spaces and material resources devoted to the collection? If so, which changes have been implemented? What specific points of contention or challenges have you faced in making changes to the collection practices and structures?

3) Does the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst collection work with a regular in-house acquisition committee or invite external members for an acquisition committee in accordance with the specific considerations of an artwork for acquisition? If so, who comprises this committee and what is their active role and decisional authority in the acquisition process? What advantages and disadvantages do you see with an acquisition committee having either a purely advisory capacity or a decisive vote on proposed acquisitions? What does a typical acquisition process for the collection consist of currently, please walk us through that timeline and processual steps of negotiating and securing the acquisition and then entering it into the collection. 

4) Who drafts a Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst acquisition agreement and who are the signatories to that agreement? Who has ultimate authority to sign the acquisition agreements on behalf of the institution? Do you believe the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst should make a standard template of the acquisition agreement publicly accessible? How much consultation with the artist do you seek out on drafting terms and conditions of the acquisition agreement, do you encourage artists to engage in that process of drafting terms and conditions for an acquisition agreement? Does the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst retain or employ legal counsel for developing the legal-economic structures of its collection and collection procedures beyond the acquisition agreements? Has legal counsel representing the Migros Museum ever engaged directly with artists (and/or their own legal counsel) whose work is being acquired?

5) How is the allocation from the Migros Culture Percentage fund decided for the total operating expenses of the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, and how then are the funds for collection acquisitions allocated from the total operating expenses? Do artists whose work is being acquired ever inquire about the origins of financing (i.e., a detailed breakdown concerning the Migros Culture Percentage funds) used to acquire their artwork for the collection? What changes to the acquisition procedures have been implemented in accordance with an artist's demands? How have you facilitated those artists' demands? Have you organized working groups with artists and other thinkers on collection practices to reconsider the political imperatives as well as the legal-economic structures and actual procedures of the collection at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst?

6) Is there any institutional precedent at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst for an artist requiring that their artwork be entered into the collection without transferring ownership over to the Museum? How might the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst collection accommodate non-ownable artwork—art that the artist for instance has designated for lease only or stewardship—in keeping with their intended withholding of ownership? Do ideas and operative structures of cooperativism (legally enforced mutual or shared ownership) directly inform the collection practices at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, if so, how?

7) Under what terms does the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst collection accept loan requests from other institutions? How does the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst's loan program vet potential borrowers and make decisions about granting those loans? Does the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst cover all expenses (transport/shipping, insurance, handling, etc.) related to loaning work from its collection? Does the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst accept donated and/or gifted artworks for the collection, if so, under what terms? Does the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst collection include any long-term loans? If so, what are the terms of these long-term loans?

8) What sociopolitical imperatives and curatorial interests motivate your work with the collection? What criteria do you emphasize for the artwork coming into the collection, and is that emphasis shared or co-created by the Co-Direction and collection team? What structures and practices have been implemented to diversify the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst's collection with respect to artists' lived experience and identity? And how does that imperative for diversity, access, and equity extend beyond collected representational content (property) so that artists' difference is actualized in the Museum's structural governance arrangements?

9) Do you and the Co-Direction aim for the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst's collection to offer methods and modalities to be studied and adapted by other collection museums? Do you see the Museum für Gegenwartskunst as a collection museum leading global efforts to critically reimagine the uses of museum collections? What is the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst's understanding of the potential for radically experimental and profoundly reparative collection practices today? How does the Museum für Gegenwartskunst's collection openly contend with its legacy of property, and resist predominant assumed rights to property ownership? How can artists who are particularly devoted to rethinking property be invited in by the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst Co-Direction to implement substantive transformations to the Museum's collection and collecting?

