

Contemporary Art and Margins **Interdisciplinary colloquium, Centre Marc Bloch, Berlin, October 9-11 2013**

This colloquium is choosing to discuss the role that margins play in the definitions of contemporary art, and especially in those that its actors devise. It will be important to understand the margins and the marginality of the actors in the art field according to their twofold character: as a programmatic stance or as an imposed situation. As far as art production is concerned, we are interested in the artistic practices that give a place to what is on the fringes of traditional art, blurring barriers and challenging established conceptions. Can the reflection on marginality in and of itself highlight the specific characteristics of contemporary art?

This issue opens up the discussion to various areas of study that we will further discuss here with an interdisciplinary perspective, crossing the domains of sociology, philosophy, geography, and art history. We propose three main focuses that seem to jointly question the notions of margins and contemporary art at the crossroads of the scientific traditions of different countries, being that the objective of this colloquium is a scientific debate not only on a Franco-German level, but also on an international one.

The first focus invites us to question the interlinked history of the concepts of margins and contemporary art. It is necessary to analyze the functions associated with the idea of marginality within the evolution of contemporary art starting in the mid-1960s. The artistic and intellectual avant-garde movements of the XX century offered a reformulation of the concept of art, allowing for a broadening of artistic practices. The concept of art has been unfurled, particularly since the 1960s, in relation to what the essentialist definition of art excluded. From that time on, we have witnessed the emergence of new stakes, where functions and expressions of art are rethought in a new way. This disruption comes from a multitude of practices that incorporate domains such as kitsch, “low art,” and technical production, which use different methods and appropriate foreign objects into the field of art. Aiming to go beyond barriers from both a production and a reception standpoint, these new artistic practices question the specificity of their approach. The inheritance from the avant-garde movements and the (in)stability of historiographical paradigms in addition to the questioning of dogmatic conceptions of art act as a starting point to begin understanding and dating the passage from modern art to contemporary art. What roles did the first avant-garde movements play in the definition of contemporary art? These questions of definition and inheritance reveal the weight of the fantasies attached to the question of margins in the field of contemporary art. How are these different representations expressed and what functions are associated with them? How do the different profiles of marginal artists begin and evolve (the damned artist, the artist in retreat, the mad artist...)?

But what margins are we talking about here? Margin or margins can be perceived as areas of exclusion but also as interfaces toward an established centrality. It is important in this sense to question oneself on the dynamics between centers and periphery, which brings us to our second focus. Margins can, in effect, constitute the singular spaces that offer resources, mark the landscape and live off of the social and spatial mobility of individuals – artists, art critics, art dealers, etc. What are the conditions of mobility of the periphery toward the centrality and vice-versa, or even between peripheries? Does marginality place itself as a condition to the artist’s recognition? Dealing with margins goes back to dealing with the mechanisms and instances where centrality is defined and where margins are created. It will become necessary here to reflect upon the nature of the interactions between institutions, whether they be private or public and the spaces of artistic centrality and marginalized producers or initiatives. The concepts of innovation and rupture have become decisive on the whole field of contemporary artistic production, widely supported – to varying degrees – by the institutions themselves. Does this expectation of “permanent revolution” challenge the nature of institutions and, consequently, the very concept of margins?

The question of transition and rupture should not hide a certain hierarchical permanency, especially in terms of genre, social backgrounds, and in North-South or West-East relationships, when it comes to both producers and the public. Our third focus will address these hierarchies in a central manner. The issues that these implicit hierarchies cause have begun to be raised by certain actors of contemporary art,

influenced by feminist and postcolonial theories – as can be seen in the curatorial choices of documenta, notably those of Catherine David, artistic director of documenta 10 (1997), and Okwui Enwezor for documenta 11 (2002) or Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev for documenta 13 (2012). Through the title “Intense Proximity,” Okwui Enwezor, curator for the 2012 edition of the Paris Triennial, also asked the question about the encounter between the local and international scales. This third focus also aims to challenge the permanency of social and spatial hierarchies and the means used by the actors to subvert them. Within this context, we will, for example, be able to bring attention to the evaluation of the politics of cultural democratization intended to make contemporary art accessible to a more heterogeneous public, or the phenomena of biennialization in the countries of the South. More generally, one could wonder to what extent the realization, or even a thematization of these issues, challenge the very definition of contemporary art.

This colloquium is primarily addressed to young researchers, who question the notion of margins in contemporary art. Its objective is to propose a dialogue between scientific disciplines but also between experienced and young researchers. It will take place in four main sessions, bringing together the selected proposals as well as the presentations by guest specialists: Jean-Michel Decroly (ULB - IGEAT Bruxelles), Bettina Gockel (University of Zürich), Boris Grésillon (University of Provence), Piotr Piotrowski (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań), Ulf Wuggenig (Leuphana University Lüneburg). Prof. Dr. Bettina Gockel will inaugurate the conference on October 9 with her contribution "Potenziale der Peripherien. Lebensräume und Denkfiguren der Avantgarden des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts".

It is desirable that all of the presentations fall into the focuses developed above, but they can also tackle other issues raised by the colloquium's title. The format of the presentations is 30 minutes, followed by a discussion. The contributions can be in French, German and English. It is very desirable for the participants to understand these three languages.

1. Scientific Committee

Peter Geimer (Freie Universität Berlin), Boris Grésillon (Université de Provence Aix-Marseille), Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (École Normale Supérieure Paris), Bénédicte Savoy (Technische Universität Berlin), Patricia Veit (Centre Marc Bloch Berlin), Ulf Wuggenig (Leuphana Universität Lüneburg)

2. Organization Committee

Léa Barbisan (Centre Marc Bloch, Berlin / Paris-Sorbonne), Maria Bremer (Freie Universität, Berlin / German Forum for Art History, Paris), Camille Boichot (Géographie-Cités Paris), Séverine Marguin (Centre Marc Bloch / Leuphana Universität Lüneburg / EHESS CRIA)

3. Proposal Submission

Presentation proposals (with title, abstract of 500 words, first and last name, status, institution, e-mail address) must be sent to art.marges@gmail.com before June 21, 2013. They will be submitted to the members of the scientific committee. Authors will be informed of selection results by July 20, 2013, at the very latest.

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