The Avant-garde and its Networks (Beirut, 14-15 Nov 16)

Orient-Institut Beirut, Nov 14–15, 2016
Deadline: Jun 15, 2016

Julia Drost

The Avant-garde and its Networks: Surrealism in Paris, North Africa and the Middle East from the 1930s

Organizers: Orient-Institut Beirut/Deutsches Forum für Kunstgeschichte Paris

Surrealism - along with Futurism - can be considered as one of the few avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century that was established in Cairo. In 1939, Georges Henein, Kamel el-Telmessany, Ramses Younan and Anwar and Fouad Kamel founded the Art and Freedom group (Jamaat al fann wal-hurriya), which continued until the late 1940s. The group was probably the only official one in the region with a direct link to André Breton. Surrealist ideas also spread to other places in the region: In Beirut in the early 1930s for example, a group of writers, artists and intellectuals, including Georges Schéhadé, Georges Cyr, Antoine Tabet, Gabriel Bounoure and others, met regularly and debated Surrealism. This group never became official, though, or released a manifesto. A few decades later, in 1981, the Algerian writer Habib Tengour authored a "Manifesto of Maghrebian Surrealism", in which he relates Surrealism to Sufism.
The Paris of André Breton is commonly recognized as the intellectual and artistic center from which Surrealism spread into other European and non-European cities. This was mainly due to individuals who lived and worked in Paris for a certain period of time, mingled in Surrealist circles and took back the new ideas to their home countries. Others, such as the Iraqi writer Abdel Kader el-Janabi, who settled in Paris in the 1970s, embraced Surrealist ideas outside their country or culture of reference, but never tried to transfer them.

Research into Surrealism in the Middle East and North Africa is still in its infancy, despite an increased interest in the subject in the last couple of years, especially in Egypt's Art and Freedom group. The Orient-Institut Beirut and the German Forum for Art History in Paris are therefore convening a workshop that will focus on the international networks between Paris, Beirut, Cairo, and other cities from North Africa to Iran. The workshop seeks to shed light on Surrealism as a political, social, literary and artistic phenomenon that migrated beyond Europe, but remained closely tied to its Parisian heartland, at least at the beginning. It is generally assumed that the artistic and cultural exchanges took place mainly between the "center" in Paris and the respective "peripheries", and less so between the peripheries themselves. This needs to be examined in more depth, and the power relationship between center and periphery itself needs to be questioned and discussed. The workshop is directed at both established and early career scholars from various fields, to come together in order to stimulate and take forward the debate on Surreal-

ism in North Africa and the Middle East.

The aim is to gather information about the networks and the reception of Surrealism and thereby to approach its dissemination in the region more systematically. In addition to this structural dimension, the workshop will attempt to look at the qualitative aspects of the movement's literary and artistic production and possible lineages. How was Surrealism transported to different places, and who were the actors? To what extent was Surrealism in the region associated with the presence and activity of Europeans living abroad? Can we identify connections between artists, galleries, magazines and newspapers, collectors, patrons, and places of encounter on a transregional as well as a transnational level? How were Surrealist ideas adapted to local contexts and how was the movement developed or reshaped by following generations?

The deadline for submission of abstracts (300 words) is 15 June 2016. Please send your abstract together with a short biographical statement to Monique Bellan (bellan@orient-institut.org) and Julia Drost (jdrost@dfk-paris.org). Successful applicants will be notified by late July 2016.

Reference:

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