The Image of the Multitude in Art and Philosophy (London, 10 Mar 18)

The Courtauld Institute of Art, London., Mar 10, 2018
Deadline: Sep 15, 2017

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Imago Multitudinis. The Image of the Multitude in Art and Philosophy

An International Conference at the Courtauld Institute of Art London, on the 10th of March.

The Courtauld Institute of Art, The British Academy and the Collège International de Philosophie are pleased to announce a one-day interdisciplinary conference focusing on the philosophical representation and the artistic conceptualisation of the multitude and its associated concepts: the many, the masses, the crowd, the mob and the commonality.

A spectre is haunting our times: the spectre of the multitude. Uprisings, popular unrests, mass migrations, revolutions—the past ten years have been marked by unprecedented quests for freedom, embodied by unconventional political subjects pointing to the possibility of alternative outcomes of the crisis of both authoritarian regimes and representative democracies. Through the masterful drawing of Abraham Bosse, Hobbes attempted to tame the multitude forever. Constrained within the body politic of the monstrous Leviathan (1651), the multitude was transfigured into an obedient people and its potentia was (apparently) usurped. Yet, the multitude resisted—and still resists—this movement, challenging the predominant definitions of sovereignty. Following the collapse of modern master narratives, such as in the nascent seventeenth century, the multitude has returned.

Our investigation revolves around the political and aesthetic meanings of this omnipresent, if elusive, collective being. In particular, we would like to ask the following questions: how do philosophers represent the multitude and translate their concepts into cogent images? How do artists think about the multitude and its agency? This enquiry, which spans from the Middle Ages to the present, concentrates on the way in which images and iconographic motifs are elaborated in philosophy, as well as how political concepts are articulated in the visual arts. In order to understand the images pervading, and the concepts informing, recent collective political action (from Tahrir Square to the streets of Tunis, New York, Madrid, Ferguson via Rojava and Lampedusa), we intend to focus on their modern and contemporary genealogies. This is not only a historical enquiry. The history of the multitude can help us better understand the present. The aesthetic, agency and ambitions of this political subject do not only survive in books and museums, they also live on among us. The multitude resists, and if this is the conflict that characterises political modernity, then modernity has begun again.

Invited speakers: Horst Bredekamp (Humboldt-Universität); Claire Fontaine (artist); Sandro Mezzadra (Università di Bologna).

We invite submissions on the following topics including, but not limited to:
- Political iconography (from the Revolt of the Ciompi to the Arab Spring via the German Peasants' War),
- Feminism and the multitude,
- The multitude in the USSR,
- The multitude and the English Civil Wars,
- Hobbes' Behemoth,
- Spinoza's, Machiavelli's, Negri's, Deleuze's and Schmitt's depictions of the multitude,
- The "popular hydra" in nineteenth-century Paris,
- Baroque and the multitude,
- The multitude and migrations in contemporary art.

Please send a title and an abstract of no more than 500 words together with a short CV to jacopo.galimberti@manchester.ac.uk by the 15th of September. Successful candidates will be notified in early October. Papers should not exceed 25 minutes in length.

Reference:

CFP: The Image of the Multitude in Art and Philosophy (London, 10 Mar 18). In: ArtHist.net, Apr 23, 2017 (accessed Nov 23, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/15312>.