Strained Bodies: Physical Tension in Art and Science (Munich, 5-6 Jul 18)

München, Haus der Kunst / ERES Foundation, Jul 5–06, 2018

Thomas Moser

Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich
Haus der Kunst
ERES Foundation

In the course of a two-day workshop, aspects of the reappraisal of strain, weight and pressure in art and science will be illuminated. Accordingly, the question in how far physical strain of bodies has been reflected artistically since the late 19th century is essentially relevant to this format. Throughout the second half of the 19th century, the term “force” was increasingly understood in a physiological manner. The rise of physiology as a leading discipline led to a radical revaluation of the human body and its conditions. In art, new scientific methods of quantification and visualization challenged previously established concepts of preservation, regulation, over-exertion, balancing, formation and application of forces in general.

In recent years, research has started focussing on specific connections between physiology informed by thermodynamics and art in Western Europe and the US. According to this, the renewed push of empiricism by no means followed a consequent exclusion of human intuitive access from experimental processes – as advised by the ideal of a “mechanical objectivity” (Daston/Galiston). Following the fin-de-siècle aesthetics of empathy, this ‘intuition of comprehension’ itself finally turns into a physiological achievement within the observer. Consequently, neither a clear distinction between man and machine nor a distinct science-art-divide are sustainable any longer. The alliance between an anthropological renewal of man as a thermodynamic machine and the laboratory-based measurement of his physique also become manifest in art through an enhanced examination of (physical) weight, strain or exhaustion.

Though sweating workers, the athlete and the muscleman remain outsiders in this discourse, utopian ideas of persistent creativity in relation to physical strength are conceived. Friedrich Nietzsche’s definition of the ideal artist as an excessive power animal (“Kraftthier”) indicates an intensification of the economy of physical and artistic energy. Art history also began to conceptualize artist heroes bursting with strength: Michelangelo’s ‘non-finito-aesthetics’, previously acclaimed as an expression of innovation and ‘sprezzatura’, were increasingly re-interpreted as a manifestation of an ostentatiously physical performance of the ingenious sculptor.

PROGRAM

Day 1 - Thursday, July 5th

ERES Foundation (Römerstraße 15)

13:15
Arrival & get together

13:45
Welcome & Introduction
Wilma Scheschonk und Thomas Moser

14:00
Session 1 - Chair: Matteo Burioni

Malika Maskarinec (Basel, CHI)
The art of the human motor: Adolph Menzel's ‘Das Eisenwalzwerk’, for example

Laura Prins (Amsterdam, NLD)
‘Rebellious nerves’: Vincent van Gogh and the artistic temperament

Paula Muhr (Berlin, GER)
Visualising the muscular force: Charcot and the healing effect of images of the strained hysterical body

15:30
Coffee break (on site)

16:00
Session 2 - Chair: Léa Kuhn

Thomas Moser (Munich, GER/ Paris, FR)
The weight of light: On Mallarmé’s reading of Loïe Fuller’s serpentine dance

Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen (Williamstown, USA)
Upending the ‘Geist der Schwere‘: Frontality, levity and the unconscious

Miriam Stanton (Philadelphia, USA)
Suspended bodies: Eadweard Muybridge and the allure of ‘unsupported transit’

17:30
Coffee to go & transition to:
LMU Main building (Geschwister-Scholl-Platz 1), Room A017

18:15
Key note - Welcome by Hubertus Kohle

Michael F. Zimmermann (Eichstätt, GER)
Stasis and ecstasy, imaging and excess (Charles Darwin, 1872 – Francis Bacon)
19:30 Conference dinner

Day 2 - Friday, July 6th
ERES Foundation (Römerstraße 15)

9:00
Session 3 - Chair: Dominik Brabant

Flora Nieß (Eichstätt, GER)
‘A line is a force’: Henry van de Velde’s physico-mechanical approach to ornament

Ole Fischer (Utah, USA)
The Nietzsche Monument Weimar: A symphony in physiological art?

Sarah Hegenbart (Munich, GER)
The Hunger Dance: Lung deflation to mimic Western imaginaires of ‘Africa’

10:30
Coffee break (on site)

11:00
Session 4 - Chair: Susanne Witzgall

Wilma Scheschonk (Hamburg/ Munich, GER)
The forces of the artist: Joseph Beuys boxing

Anna Dezeuze (Marseille, FR)
Sweat, strain and surplus in Mika Rottenberg’s Tropical Breeze

Jasmin Mersmann (Berlin, GER/ Linz, AUT)
Body sculpting: Paradessent strategies in contemporary art

12:30
Lunch & transition to:
Haus der Kunst (Prinzregentenstraße 1)

14:30
Curator's tour with Anna Schneider
Exhibition ‘Blind Faith’

PLEASE NOTE: Due to the limited space at the ERES foundation, we kindly ask you to address your request for attendance to w.scheschonk@zikg.eu and tmoser@dfk-paris.org.

Organizing committee:
Thomas Moser (LMU Munich/ Deutsches Forum für Kunstgeschichte Paris)
Wilma Scheschonk (University of Hamburg/Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte)

Reference:

CONF: Strained Bodies: Physical Tension in Art and Science (Munich, 5-6 Jul 18). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 25, 2018 (accessed Nov 24, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/18445>.