Postwar Narratives of Collecting (Rome, 14 Dec 18)

Rome, Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome, Dec 14, 2018

Arnold Witte

Why do we collect, how do we legitimise it for ourselves or for others, and what does that say about our culture? Collecting as a practice has been studied from various perspectives, beginning with Julius von Schlosser who in 1908 regarded it as a characteristic trait of the human soul - collecting objects was part of an inborn urge. Based on Lacan, Mieke Bal sustained the same in her famous essay on collecting, but then from a narrativist perspective – each collection is an on-going narrative for the collector as an individual by which means (s)he sublimates anxieties. Meanwhile, the collecting of contemporary art has attracted a lot of scholarly and critical attention in the last decades, but the discussion of this phenomenon decidedly deviated from the psychological perspective by focusing on the economic aspects of the art markets and their global development, the postcolonial situation, interculturality and the rise of the non-western artist. While the former, psychological perspective suggests that collecting does not change over time, the latter strand of research starts from the assumption that indeed collecting has very recently changed, quite radically even, turning into a global phenomenon.

The present workshop, organized by Arnold Witte, aims to open up a new perspective by building on both traditions but confronting the underlying assumptions. It starts with the observation that after 1945 the acquisition of contemporary art works became ever more important for a growing public – thanks to new buyers and as a result of government policies in industrialized countries – and institutions such as museums who increasingly collected contemporary art. Furthermore, new actors appeared on the scene, such as auction houses and corporate art collections. Businesses started to buy or commission contemporary art in order to embellish their employees' offices or show it to a wider public. Belonging to this latter group are also non-profit institutions such as hospitals, which embraced art as part of their medical philosophy. Finally, artists and galleries were confronted with new expectations and adjusted their art and strategies to this new situation by incorporating, avoiding or refuting these narratives.

All these changes created the need for new legitimations that took the form of narratives, invented to justify the act of collecting for individuals, institutions and governments. It could also lead to counter-narratives, in the form of an art that defied the market, as in the case of (early) Arte Povera. These narratives also have implications for how then and now art was and is defined. This workshop aims to explore these narratives and their dynamics, by mapping the various motives formulated by actors in the field of collecting between 1945 and the early 2000s, in order to explore in what ways the act of collection adapted to the ideologies of the post-war era.

Programme:
14:00 to 19:00

Jim Carter (American Academy in Rome):
-Industry, Culture and the New Humanism in Postwar Italy: The Case of Il Menabò - Jim Carter

Sara Piccinini (Collezione Maramotti)
-Collezione Maramotti. An out of fashion art collecting

Sabrina Kamstra (Academic Medical Center, Amsterdam)
-Why collecting for an Academical medical center?

Monika Kackovic (University of Amsterdam)
-Identify with your employer? You probably like the Art: A study on identity orientations and organizational non-core activities

Jan de Groot (University of Amsterdam)
-History for legitimacy: how curators of corporate art collections explain their acquisition decisions

Francesca Gallo (Università di Roma La Sapienza)
-Interview with Giuseppe Garrera on collecting

Reference:
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