

The Production of the Self: Marisa Merz (Philadelphia, 23-24 Apr 20)

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA, Apr 23–24, 2020

Deadline: Dec 13, 2019

Lara Demori

The Production of the Self: Marisa Merz Study Day & Workshop

"Between the calculated objectual abstraction, which produces geometric forms, and automatic abstraction, which produces organic forms, it seems possible to search for shapes that are neither geometric nor organic. In this sense, that of Marisa Merz is an anticipatory attempt. In the new space occupied by her, we feel a sense of pulsation and self-formation: repetition, progression, and free adjustment of forms. These 'things' are entrusted to themselves.

So the question is, what will they be?"

Tommaso Trini, 1967

Coming of age in Italy in the turbulence of the 1960s, Marisa Merz (1926–2019) occupies a unique and pivotal position in the history of post-war Italian art. Following her first solo exhibition at Turin's Gian Enzo Sperone Gallery in 1967, she participated as the only woman artist in exhibitions later associated with Arte Povera—a term coined by curator Germano Celant to describe a rising 'guerrilla' art movement made up of artists whose work emphasized process and the use of unconventional materials in an attempt to connect art and life. Imbuing the ordinary with redemptive and revelatory qualities, Merz's sculptures, paintings, and drawings characteristically employ malleable materials like copper wire, wax, and unfired clay.

For many years, Merz refrained from dating her artwork and presenting it in traditional exhibition settings. This selective participation marginalized the artist from inclusion in the larger art system, further propelled by the ways in which that same system centered on the work of men. As can be inferred, Merz held a debatable position amongst her Arte Povera contemporaries as she developed a singular practice that reflects a continuous exploration of the tensions between the domestic and the public – describing her work as *lavoro di casa* (housework) – as well as the spiritual and the profane – harkening back to Italian inter-war trends like the *antigrizioso* (anti-graceful) forms of the Futurists and the rarefied atmospheres of the *ritorno all'ordine* (return to order) movement.

Today, Merz's oeuvre has received international acclaim, beginning with a solo exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in 1994 and, more recently, a retrospective that travelled from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles in 2017. Currently on view at the Philadelphia Museum of Art is a gallery dedicated to the artist's work across several decades.

In conjunction with this presentation, the Philadelphia Museum of Art is hosting The Production of the Self: Marisa Merz Study Day & Workshop on Friday, April 24, 2020 from 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM, which will include invited speaker presentations as well as round-table discussions, preceded by a Keynote Public Lecture on Thursday, April 23. Organized by Dr. Lara Demori, the Marcello Rumma Fellow in Contemporary Italian Art and Amanda Sroka, Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art, this Study Day not only pays homage to Merz's life and legacy, but it also aims to discuss aspects of the artist's practice often overlooked by scholarly criticism.

The organizers are currently seeking speakers to participate in the Study Day & Workshop and welcome 250-word abstracts on, but not limited to, Merz's:

- relationship to reproductive labor, domesticity, and the weight of classical tradition in respect to the artist's practice and that of fellow post-war Italian artists
- connection (or lack thereof) to contemporaneous women artists as well as feminist activists in Italy and abroad
- ambiguous position amongst the artists associated with Arte Povera
- sensitivity to material and form
- legacy amongst a younger generation of artists

Please note that a honorarium will be provided to Study Day speakers and Workshop participants. After final speaker selections are made, invitations to attend the workshop will be distributed in early 2020.

Abstract Requirements:

- 250 words
- CV (no more than 2 pages)
- Written in English (all presentations will be conducted in English)

All abstracts should be submitted in either PDF or Microsoft Word format to Lara.Demori@philamuseum.org by Friday, December 13, 2019 and will be notified of participation by December 31, 2019.

Event Details:

The Production of the Self: Marisa Merz Study Day & Workshop

Keynote Lecture

Thursday, April 23, 2020

6:00 – 8:00 PM

Philadelphia Museum of Art

Study Day & Workshop

Friday, April 24, 2020

10:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Philadelphia Museum of Art

Reference:

CFP: The Production of the Self: Marisa Merz (Philadelphia, 23-24 Apr 20). In: ArtHist.net, Oct 17, 2019 (accessed Apr 5, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/21855>>.