

View, issue 30: Visual cultures of class

Deadline: Oct 10, 2020

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View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture, issue 30

VISUAL CULTURES OF CLASS

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“How is it that when two Western businessmen meet –let’s say, for lunch – they need only cast one glance to recognize their class?”, asked a journalist writing for the Polish magazine *Sukces* [Success] in the early years of the post-socialist transition. In a mode characteristic for late capitalism (and its late application in Eastern and Central Europe) this colloquial understanding of the word ‘class’ is meant to designate not one’s social position, but an aesthetic and affective disposition. Instead of belonging to a class, one can have class (or not) and demonstrate its possession through aesthetic competences, ways of using and styling one’s body etc. This means that only some classes can be classy. Furthermore, only one of them – the middle class – is visible as a class, the rest represented in terms of individual failure or success. Of course, this popular understanding is directly connected with the classic definitions of class, either as the relation of a group to means of production or to the “market possibilities” of individuals from a given class. But the idea of “being classy” (“It is not difficult to recognize class and highest quality. It might not scream money, but it sure smells like it,” writes the journalist) prompts a similarly obvious question: are classes visible at all? Is it possible to show class as collective, united by common experiences and interests, or are representations of class always limited to depictions of individual representatives of classes?

Class has long been conceptualized as strongly dependent on representation, thanks to which a class in an empirical sense (a group of individuals) becomes a class in a political sense. Hence perhaps the urgency of the recurring question about the complex relations between representations of social classes and their lived realities. Are representations of classes merely external constructs created by dominant discourses or are they predominantly created by the classes themselves? Perhaps an analysis of visual culture can help in reposing a crucial, and yet hitherto unanswered, question about class: do classes exist only as categories or are they actual social realities?

It seems that an analysis of the visual cultures of class can be undertaken along several, often intersecting, lines: the presence (or absence) of the category of class, as well as the visibility (or invisibility) of particular social classes in a given historical moment; the politics of representing social classes and relations between them; images produced within particular social classes and practices of creating, circulating and consuming these images; aesthetical strategies of produc-

ing or eradicating class hierarchies; the relation between the history of visual media and practices of representing classes; practices of looking of specific social classes (real or imagined). We thus invite you to submit articles on the following subjects:

We're waiting for your abstracts (max 300 words) and short bios until October 10, 2020. The final submission (along with a biographical note with the author's ORCID number, abstract, and bibliography in Chicago-style format) will be due on December 15, 2020.

Please send your proposal to: redakcja@pismowidok.org.

For editorial and technical requirements, see <https://www.pismowidok.org/en/about/submissions>.

Reference:

CFP: View, issue 30: Visual cultures of class. In: ArtHist.net, Sep 13, 2020 (accessed Jun 29, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/23450>>.