

The Body in Political Art in Early Modern Times (Toulouse, 10-11 Jun 21)

Toulouse, Hôtel d'Assézat, Jun 10-11, 2021

Deadline: Dec 1, 2020

Mathilda Blanquet

Body & Power: The body in political art in early modern times

International symposium for young researches

During the Renaissance, it became common to see bodies, both male and female, transformed and strategically exploited through artworks. Real or mythical, aged or juvenile, often bearers of a complex imaginary, they were conceived and perceived as metaphors and regularly used as propaganda devices. In early modern times, the representation of the body had a fundamental place in the process of exaltation and legitimation of the elite. Within the framework of this symposium, any commission exhibiting one or more bodies, intended to celebrate a form of political power, may be considered.

The body has been apprehended as a political tool in historicizing studies, especially based on the concept of the two bodies of the king (Ernst Kantorowicz in the 1950s), while in the field of Art History, interest in political iconography has developed on the basis of the work of Aby Warburg. Since 1991, thanks to the impulse of Martin Warnke, the Warburg Haus in Hamburg has been carrying out research based on the exceptional index of documents and political images kept in their archives (e.g. the emblematic publication of the "Politische Ikonographie manual. Ein Handbuch: Bd.1: Abdankung bis Huldigung. Bd. 2: Imperator bis Zwerg conducted" by Uwe Fleckner, Martin Warnke and Hendrik Ziegler). Moreover, the researches of the french historian Gérard Sabatier, which expressed the interest in visual strategies in the service of the monarchy, demonstrates the development of these themes in France. As a matter of fact, it was the figure of the king that was favored, both in scientific works and events on the subject, as also attested by the conference presented in Blois in 2010: "Roi cherché, roi montré, roi transfiguré. Corps politique et corps du pouvoir en Europe (XVe-XVIe siècles)".

"Body and Power" tends to emancipate from the figure of the prince - although central but not exclusive. Leaders rely on the idealization of their own person, in order to strengthen their preeminence. While their bodies were staged and glorified within their portraits - as an essential device to reassure or impress - they could also be juxtaposed with other elements. Then, in the field of genders studies, researches have shown how the male and female bodies maintain and exacerbate complex relations of domination within this iconography of power.

The bodies of these secondary figures, enemies or allies, would intensify the message conveyed,

being integrated within or beyond their images. In this way, all bodies could be discussed: those of the elites as well as those of the auxiliaries, intended to support the idea of power from a semantic perspective. Then, it will be necessary to question the elements which made this power concrete, visible and palpable. Ceremonial objects covered their bodies to transcend it while in response, bodies covered the objects in turn, all articulating a substantial discourse that should be deciphered. These bodies were also found in palaces and other locations where authority was exercised. Within perennial as well as ephemeral decorations, they punctuated the facades through anthropomorphic orders, housed niches, adorned porticoes of triumphal entrances, inhabited fountains, chimneys, stairs, etc. In this case too, each of these expressions requires a reflection on its context of creation and exhibition, as well as on its purpose.

The political dimension of these creations still deserves to be deepened, especially through the prism of what Victor Stoïchita describes as a constitutive heterogeneity of the body object ("l'hétérogénéité constitutive de l'objet corps" (in) "Des Corps, Anatomie, Défense, Fantasmés", 2019). Therefore, the program revolves around the inherent relationship between the body and the polysemy of the terms "power" and "potency", denoting skills as well as strength or authority. The posture, the body language, the musculature attribute, the sensuality, the grace and the elegance that emanate from it, contribute to the translation of ideas. The body is both subordinated and esteemed by and for power and, like a mirror effect, it is also through its aesthetic, emotional and symbolic power that it honors and values the powerful ones.

For so long the biblical reference served as a pretext for the exhibition of these bodies, the reappropriation of antique culture caused them to leave the private and sacred spheres to gain public space. This development testifies to a generalized understanding of the hermeneutic force, of the expressive and persuasive scope of the body whose evocative power develops with regard to the close relationship between physical impression and psychological aspect. These compositions full of vitality, affect and dynamism have given, from ambivalent and sometimes violent subjects, an emotional and sensory force essential to the process of political seduction. Then it is a question of appreciating the place of the senses - optical and haptic - in political iconography, both formally and semiotically.

In short, the ambition of these two days is to explore issues related to the body carrying a political discourse, by mobilizing works created from the Renaissance to the dawn of the 19th century. By bringing together young and experienced researchers, both French and foreigners, this event will make it possible to confront methodologies (formal, iconographic, aesthetic approaches...) by bringing together various case studies discussing these imposing, heroic, seductive, disquieting or repulsive bodies, whose anatomy was more or less unveiled to embody, among other things, the figure of the invincible victor as opposed to the vulnerable victim.

Papers will explore topics fitting into these four main themes:

- The body as a figurative strategy in the representations of elites
- The power of the body: senses and emotions ignited in the political imagination
- Powers of the body in ceremonial objects
- The reigns of the body in princely decorations

Paper proposals should include a title and abstract (approximately 350-500 words in English or French), a brief bio-bibliography and contact information. They should be sent by December 1 at

the latest to the following address:

corps.pouvoir@gmail.com

The scientific committee will respond to proposals before December 15, 2020.

A package will be proposed to stakeholders to cover travel and accommodation costs as much as possible. The publication of a volume of the conference proceedings is planned.

Organizing committee :

Mathilda Blanquet, Simon Colombo, Juliette Souperbie
(Université Toulouse II Jean Jaurès)

Scientific Committee:

Giulia Cicali (EHESS), Nicolas Cordon (HICSA - Paris I), Sophie Duhem (Université Jean Jaurès, Toulouse), Frank Fehrenbach (Hamburg Universität), Pascal Julien (Université Jean Jaurès, Toulouse), Emilie Roffidal (Université Jean Jaurès, Toulouse), Victor Stoïchita (University of Fribourg).

Reference:

CFP: The Body in Political Art in Early Modern Times (Toulouse, 10-11 Jun 21). In: ArtHist.net, Oct 19, 2020 (accessed Sep 27, 2024), <<https://arthist.net/archive/23748>>.