

CFP: Art Theory as Visual Epistemology (Stockholm, 24-27 Oct 2012)

Art History Conference NORDIK 2012, Stockholm, Sweden, Oct 24-27, 2012

Deadline: Jan 15, 2012

Dr. Harald Klinke, Institut für Kunstgeschichte

Call for Papers: Art Theory as Visual Epistemology

Art History Conference NORDIK 2012

How can we know? What does knowledge mean? These were the fundamental questions of epistemology in the 17th century. In response to continental rationalism the British empiricist John Locke proposed that the only knowledge humans can have is acquired a posteriori. In a discussion of the human mind, he argues, the source of knowledge is sensual experience – mostly vision.

With the central claim of epistemology art became a question of truth and sound knowledge: Is the artist able to identify truth just like a scientist does? How can the artist contribute to a collective search for truth? Can pictures and statues represent knowledge about the world? Joshua Reynolds, the president of the Royal Academy in London, answered clearly: Yes, it is the task of the artist to see and compare nature in order to abstract the idea behind the mere visual. He stated that this “mental labour” is central to the artist’s occupation. Moreover, the artist is able to give those seen and imagined truths a representation on canvas and, thus, communicate ideas and add to the collective knowledge by visual means.

Reynolds’ unequivocal view rebuffs a much older point: Plato in his *Politeia* described the task of the artist as that of a mere copyist of visual nature. Being unable to have direct access to the realm of ideas, the artist is therefore placed socially even lower than the craftsman. Centuries of art critics have refused to accept this definition and tried to upvalue the potential of visual representation as a major intellectual task. William Blake for example said, art is able to represent truths, but not in the strict rational sense of Reynolds. Accordingly, the real process of creating truths is the process of producing the artwork itself, not the preceding thought process.

The making of art is when real creativity and imagination abounds – an approach that reappears in modernist thinking. Questions of the epistemic potential of art can be found throughout centuries (Bellori, de Piles, Félibien and others) until today. However, those are not questions of art alone, but of the re-presentational value of images in general. The history of art theory can contribute much to recent discussions in Visual Studies (Moxey) and Bildwissenschaften (Belting) by showing the historic dimension of arguments on what images are or should be. “What is knowledge?” is as much a philosophic question as “What is an image?” (Boehm). Objective representation has been discussed in various contexts, such as in 18th century natural sciences (Daston) and becomes essential with the rise of photography and today’s digital image (Mitchell).

This session should therefore gather approaches on images in the light of the epistemological capacity of images, the process of image production and the role of the producer of images.

Papers should deal with questions such as:

- Do different visual media have different epistemic power?
- Is there anything fundamentally new about digital imaging?
- How can we learn from older art theories for the understanding of today's new visual media?

Chair: Harald Klinke, Ph.D., Dept. of Art History, Kunstgeschichtliches Seminar, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, hklinke@uni-goettingen.de

NB: Direct your communication both to the chairs of relevant sessions and to the conference organisers at: papers.nordik2012@arthistory.su.se

This is one panel at the NORDIK conference. We invite paper proposals for the 21 sessions spanning a wide range of topics.

Submit a 1-2 page abstract, brief c.v. (two pages max.), and full contact information by January 15th, 2012.

More information: <http://nordicarthistory.org/conference>

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Reference:

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