

## Contemp. Painting in Context (Copenhagen, 25-26 Nov 05)

Kirsten Zeuthen

Contemporary Painting in Context:

Exploring the Field of Painting in Contemporary Culture and Visuality

A conference on recent transformations of the discipline of painting and their relations to the wider cultural and historical contexts

November 25 - 26, 2005.

Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek & Royal Academy of Fine Arts,  
Copenhagen

Two attitudes have been prevalent in the discourse on painting of the last decades. One has been inherited from the 1960s and says that painting is an institution that is burned out and only survives thanks to the demand of the art market for this utterly conservative and outmoded art form. The other one says that today painting is fused into innovative hybrids with so many other art forms and media that it has transformed itself into an "expanded field." Its possibilities of expression and its diversity seem to be limitless, and the only common denominator to be identified is that painting, like most contemporary art, rests on a conceptual basis. That is to say that the painting of today has an ambivalent status as a discipline that appears to be simultaneously exhausted and inexhaustible. The answer why is not only to be found in the long history of painting itself, but also in the common visual culture and the development of new types of image production and consumption, of new optical systems and new types of visual experience - a development that painting takes part in. On the one hand, painting has lost ground to new visual technologies. Thus, it is a commonly held opinion that painting, with its time-consuming mode of reception and short distance of communication, loses the competition with the fast and far-reaching electronic media and the cheaper, mass-reproduced types of pictures. On the other hand, visual culture, consumer culture, and the general historical processes of transformation are also vital sources of the ongoing self-renewal of painting, its inexhaustibility. The purpose of this conference is to explore the expansion of the field of painting over the last decades in relation to the more general lines of development in contemporary culture and visuality. In which way can paintings of today be said to reflect and

reflect on the historical transformations of culture, visibility and image production and consumption

Is it possible to "explain" some of the changes and extensions of the field of painting by placing it in the wider context of cultural history or visual culture studies

And which

methodological challenges is such a heavy-handed contextualisation confronted with by an aesthetic discipline in which many art works are based on the suggestive effects of colours and abstract or semi-abstract forms

The following issues will be at the core of the conference:

### 1. Painting in the Common Culture

The purpose of this section is two-fold: To identify and discuss some of the most important issues and theoretical questions raised by contemporary painting; and to situate painting in relation to a wider cultural context by focusing on the relationship between recent developments in painting and "the scopic regimes" and historical processes of late modernity.

### 2. The Expanded Field

This section will focus on two specific types of painterly practice that may even overlap each other: The first one is the, often site-specific, crossover between painting and installation art that colonizes entire rooms, turning the object painting into a spatial ambience. The second type is painting employed as a kind of social tool by artists who are working with painting in a social context, and who foreground the social and political aspects of painting instead of the aesthetic impact of the work. Among many other questions these types of painting raise the question of the connections and differences between such painters' projects and the kinds of contemporary art sometimes termed relational aesthetics, interventive strategies etc. as well as traditional types of public art and site-specific art.

### 3. Painting, Institutions, Market

The purpose of this section is to discuss the role of painting in the institutional and economic systems in order to shed light on the ways in which they contribute to sustaining the high status of painting. At least as a starting point, their holding of painting in high esteem must be seen in relation to the historical adaptation of these systems to primarily painting. That other, mostly new media have been less adaptable to institutional and economic interests (e.g. digital art, performance art, installation art) might be an indirect token of this adaptation. The section will focus on museum acquisition policies since the 1980s: Why do museums and collectors continue to give high priority to painting

Is it because painting is intensively promoted commercially, i.e. in

galleries and at art fairs

Or is it because many museums and collections are already, by virtue of their institutional history, specially geared to exhibiting paintings

#### 4. Rethinking the Ontology of Painting

It is long time since we left behind the modernist notion that painting has a universal and irreducible core or essence that remains unchanged at all times. The definition of painting changes inexorably over the course of history. The form of painting regarded as important during a given phase of history is the form of painting that can convince its audience that it complies with the current paradigm. Thus, the task of contemporary painters is not to seek for the Essence of painting, but to discover the conventions and rules, or the model, that will establish their works as paintings pertinent to their own time. What is the prevalent model or models today

How could we answer the ontological question of the nature of painting today

Could painting be redefined as a discipline or the role of colour be rethought for instance by mediating between contextualist and essentialist approaches to art

#### 5. Painting and the Question of Gender-Specificity

Feminists of the 1970s and 1980s regarded painting as a male dominated and problematic discipline. They pointed out that the art historical canon of great Western masters only included male painters, and that women artists had very little chance of gaining recognition on their own terms and making a career within this field because tradition had created the prejudice that women were unable to make real 'masterpieces.' Accordingly, many women artists preferred to work within other disciplines or develop new fields like body art and video art. Since the 1990s this situation has dramatically changed. Quite a number of women have chosen painting as their primary medium, often consciously and playfully using a palette and a pictorial language readily associated with femininity. Due to these changes within the field of painting the question of gender-specificity is raised anew:

What are the connections between gender and choice of medium, style, subject, and pictorial means of expression

Program:

[http://www.hum.ku.dk/nnfc/paint\\_program.htm](http://www.hum.ku.dk/nnfc/paint_program.htm)

Friday, November 25

Venue: Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Kgs. Nytorv 1

9-9.30 Arrival and coffee

9.30-12.10 Morning Session

"Opening remarks"

Mikkel Bogh, Associate Professor of Modern Culture, University of Copenhagen, Director of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen

Section 1: Painting in the Common Culture

"'Contemporary': 'Common': 'Context': 'Criticism'

Painting (while painting) after the end of Postmodernism" Jonathan Harris, Professor of Art History, University of Liverpool

Break

"The Promise of Painting"

Peter Weibel, Professor, Director of the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe

Lunch break

13.10-17.00 Afternoon Session

Section 2: The Expanded Field

"The Poise Of The Head und die anderen folgen"

Katharina Grosse, Painter, Düsseldorf

" Painting Spaces"

Anne Ring Petersen, Associate Professor of Modern Culture, University of Copenhagen

Coffee break

Section 3: Painting, Institutions, Market

"YBA Saatchi

: from Shark Sensation to Pastoral Painting"

Chin-tao Wu, Research Fellow at the Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan

"The Longing for Order: Painting as the Gatekeeper of Harmony"

Gitte Ørskou, Curator, ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum

20.00

Evening Banquet at Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Kgs. Nytorv 1

Saturday, November 26

Venue: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek

9.15-9.30 Coffee

9.30-12.15 Morning Session

#### Section 4: Rethinking the Ontology of Painting

"Painting: Ontology and Experience"

Stephen Melville, Professor of Art History, Ohio State University

Break

"Pierre Menard, Painter of the Meninas' and Other Stories"

Barry Schwabsky, Writer, Critic and Editor, London

Lunch break

13.45-16.00 Afternoon Session

#### Section 5: Painting and the Question of Gender-Specificity

"Claims for a Feminist Politics in Painting"

Katy Deepwell, Art Critic and Editor of the feminist art journal  
n.paradoxa, London

Coffee break

"Matter and Meaning: 'the slime of painting'"

Rune Gade, Associate Professor of Art History, University of Copenhagen

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Registration by November 11, 2005.

Registration fee: 250 DKK / 35 Euros.

Friday evening banquet: 200 DKK / 30 Euros.

For further information, please contact:

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Copenhagen Doctoral School in Cultural Studies,

Literature, and the Arts

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Organising committee:

Mikkel Bogh (University of Copenhagen)

Hans Dam Christensen (University of Copenhagen)

Peter Nørgaard Larsen (Statens Museum for Kunst,  
The Danish National Gallery)

Anne Ring Petersen (University of Copenhagen)

ArtHist.net

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