

The Museum and Contemporary Art (Copenhagen, 2008/09)

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Call for Papers

The Museum and Contemporary Art

"Honor the art of the past, make contemporary art a blast."^[1]

The Copenhagen Doctoral School in Cultural Studies focuses on the often conflictive relationship between the museum and contemporary art in two workshops and a conference.

In the continuously changing landscape of art forms and definitions museums have always been confronted with the problem of selecting and therefore intervening in the evolution of art history. Today their choice seems harder than ever. Museums now have to ask not only which artist is more pertinent than another, but also distinguish the suitability of a given medium in the context of particular collections or exhibitions. The fundamentals of the relation between contemporary art and the museum are now challenged by the idea of the experience culture, which seems to be superseding that of culture as something to acquire, which used to inform exhibition practices in the museum. It is to the identification of the symptoms of this change as well as to the analysis of its impact on the relationship between the museum and contemporary art that The Copenhagen Doctoral School in Cultural Studies wishes to direct an inquiry.

Whether this situation originates in market interests, changes in artistic practices or pressure from municipal, regional, and national politicians under the influence of the trends of experience economy, it prompts reflection on the place and function of contemporary art in the museum. Which narratives on contemporary art are created inside and outside the museum walls, and how do they relate to the museum? How is contemporary art marketed and mediated? How is its story told by traditional and new stakeholders? How do artists navigate in the stream of experience culture?

Would one possible response to the development of contemporary art consist in upgrading mediation services? Do museums have to step up to

the increasingly accessible nature of contemporary art by enhancing possibilities of engagement with the works through increased mediation? Would the idea of experience culture thus constitute another step in the history of the liquidation of elitist art - a history stretching back as far as the museum itself - examples of which can be found in Impressionism, the historical avant-gardes, and Minimalism? In this perspective, how could the increased interest in art forms and immaterial practices such as performances and net art be analyzed and how do museums answer the challenges linked specifically to their exhibition?

The impact of current transformations might be more fundamental than the call for more mediation would imply. It could be argued that the idea of experience culture transforms the nature of art itself, which would eventually convert the museum into a space dedicated to the much larger phenomenon of culture. Or, based on the same observation, the radical separation of historical and contemporary art could be suggested. In the context of a contemporary art, which seems to take its bearings from horizontal rather than vertical developments, one must also ask the question of the capacity of art historians to administer contemporary art. Should contemporary art at least partly be moved out of the survey museum?

The status of the art museum being fundamentally challenged by experience culture, the stakes of a large number of contemporary artists in the museum also merit attention. Is exhibiting in the museum simply a way to access important sources of finance which would remain beyond the reach of a purely political or socially oriented art? Is the museum merely one of many showrooms in a complex exhibition strategy in which the museum has lost its primacy? Do museums lose their specificity when engaging in the production of art, or may the reconfiguration of museums into production units constitute an answer to the changes it is currently facing?

The Copenhagen Doctoral School in Cultural Studies invites PhD-students, post-docs, and young researchers to participate in two international workshops and a conference committed to examining the challenges of exhibiting contemporary art in a museal setting.

The first workshop will take place at the University of Copenhagen on April 14 and 15 2008. 10-15 participants are invited to present a problem within the context of the conference subject. The paper (25-30 minutes) should include references to at least one recent exhibition or exhibition practice. Each presentation will be followed by a 30-minute discussion.

For the second workshop all participants will be asked to work on the

exhibition Reality Check - Contemporary Art from the Mid-90s to the Present (Statens Museum for Kunst, <http://www.smk.dk> (English version available), September 2008 - January 2009). After a visit to the exhibition in September, paper contents will be agreed upon and prepared by each of the participants for a work session at the museum on October 4 and 5 2008. The exhibition curator, Marianne Torp, has agreed to take part in the discussions.

The workshops will provide the foundational work for a 2-3 day conference planned for March 2009. A separate call for papers will be edited for that event. Workshop participants are strongly urged to send in proposals, although all participants cannot expect to be included along with the invited speakers at the conference. A number of working methods will be pursued, ranging from public paper presentations to discussions of ongoing PhD and post-doc projects in smaller forums.

Participants should be prepared to engage very actively in the meetings. The working language will be English. External speakers may be invited for short presentations at both workshops, and working methods altered to best stimulate discussions as they progress. Depending on the outcome of the three sessions, and the possibilities of obtaining financial support a publication is envisaged. Participants should be prepared to submit a printed copy of their presentations for use in the discussions.

The Copenhagen Doctoral School in Cultural Studies sponsors lunch, coffee, and a dinner at each of the workshops. In addition, the conference will finance one return ticket for international participants at a reasonable tariff. This ticket is reserved for the visit of the exhibition in September. A limited number of scholarships are available for participants with no possibility of obtaining financial support from their home institutions (one plane or train return ticket per workshop). A short application signed by the director of the applicant's home institution should be attached to the abstract.

Participation in at least both workshops in 2008, preferably also the conference in 2009, is required.

Abstracts of no more than 200 words, including a CV and contact information for one academic reference, should be sent to Manager Kirsten Zeuthen cds@hum.ku.dk no later than March 1 2008. Applicants should expect to receive an answer by March 8 2008.

The workshops and the conference will be organized and moderated by Rune Gade (PhD, Associate Professor, University of Copenhagen) and

Jesper Rasmussen (PhD-student, University of Copenhagen and University of Paris-Nanterre).

[1] Danish art historian Julius Lange jokingly suggested this phrase as an inscription for the new State Museum of Art in a private letter dating from 1896. See Villads Villadsen: Statens Museum for Kunst 1827-1952 (Gyldendal, Copenhagen, 1998): 125.

Reference:

CFP: The Museum and Contemporary Art (Copenhagen, 2008/09). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 11, 2008 (accessed May 10, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/30091>>.