

Music & Modernism (London, 16 May 09)

Cynthia de Souza

Music and Modernism

Study day to be held at the Courtauld Institute of Art
Saturday 16 May 2009

Call for Papers

Exploring Kandinsky's contention that the 'various arts are drawing together [...] finding in music the best teacher', Music and Modernism will re-evaluate the significant connections between the disciplines of music and fine art in the period covering the emergence and flowering of Modernism, c. 1849 - 1950. During this time both music and fine art were concerned with issues of equality, equivalence, relativity and subjectivity - themes that have since been taken as key to the definition of Modernism. Composers and artists repeatedly borrowed from one another, yet their motives have seldom been explored. Did such quotation amount to a conscious statement of their modernity, or was this merely a symptom of shared interests? This study day will question not only what it was music gave to fine art, or fine art music, but will ask whether we can in fact think in terms of two opposing directions of influence in this period at all.

Contemporary criticism adopted an overtly musical language for modernism that had been defined in the philosophy of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Bergson. This was however a reflexive process in which the use of a shared terminology in turn expanded the range of musical vocabulary. Filtered into popular texts, the precision which distinguished analogous intent from synonymous intent rapidly vanished, leaving scholars with an ill-defined discourse that is too readily accepted. Critically appraising the outcome of this richly suggestive inter-textuality, Music and Modernism will question the value, relevance, and usage of this terminology.

The linguistic convergence of art and music in this period was itself couched in the broader developments of psychology. Noting our innate 'susceptibility' to music, William James was one amongst many to instigate and chart a shift in emphasis from description to emotional directness. Re-thinking the reception of artworks in terms of the representational or the abstract, philosophers, psychologists, and critics gave voice to an

aesthetic appreciation that was increasingly questioning of its cultural situation. This cross-culturalism encouraged a shift from the traditional division of the arts that had held sway since Lessing's 'Laokoon' (1766) to embrace a melding of media and reference in the act or event of creation.

Keynote speaker: Peter Vergo (University of Essex), 'Music and the Visual Arts: Some "Unanswered Questions"

Twenty minute papers are invited from scholars, artists, and musicians.

Topics may include, but are not restricted to:

Questions of language

Representation: writing, notation, visualisation of music, music publishing

Creativity

Disciplinarity

Collaborative projects

Synaesthesia

Reception: association, subjectivity, polemic

Performance: issues of staging, artwork as event

* The Gesamtkunstwerk

Please send proposals (max 300 words) to Charlotte.Demille@courtauld.ac.uk by 31 January 2009.

With the generous support of the Royal Musical Association

Courtauld Institute of Art, Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 0RN

tel +44 207 848 2909 web

<http://www.courtauld.ac.uk/researchforum/calendar.shtml>

Reference:

CFP: Music & Modernism (London, 16 May 09). In: ArtHist.net, Dec 4, 2008 (accessed Jan 6, 2026),

<<https://arthist.net/archive/31066>>.