

Event Culture – The Museum and Its Staging (Kopenhagen, 6–7 Nov 09)

Rune Gade

Event Culture:

The Museum and Its Staging of Contemporary Art

<http://eventculture.ikk.ku.dk/>

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Venues: Arken Museum of Modern Art, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art

Copenhagen Doctoral School of Cultural Studies

Department of Arts and Cultural Studies

The role of the art museum has changed drastically during the past decades. So has the role of contemporary art within the art museum. Once institutions for preserving and producing knowledge for eternity, museums increasingly become arenas for experience and events of the moment. The interest in contemporary art towards re-uniting art and life in 'micro utopian' models, such as proposed by Nicolas Bourriaud, makes art works perform in ways not incomparable to the workings of the entertainment industry. The shared tendency between museums and contemporary art towards staging and performing ephemeral events and experiences changes the fundamental functions of the museum within a broader cultural context and might indeed change the very role of art in society as well.

The conference critically addresses these changes and their implications on several levels:

On a cultural level the changes call for a rethinking of the functions of the art museum. Where the idea of preservation was central to the founding of museum institutions, preservation seems less important today. Rather, the focus has shifted towards another core aspect of the museum institution, namely that of public accessibility and audiences. This indicates a shift from substance and solidity towards activity and performance; the representation of history, which can be considered an important motive for preservation, has gradually become less outspoken, while representation of contemporaneity in various guises simultaneously has grown in significance. This raises many

questions, among them the questions of what knowledge the museum institution produces and which public demands it facilitates.

On a curatorial level these changes manifest themselves in a tendency towards privileging the temporary exhibition over the permanent collection. The permanent collection regarded as the sum of the preservation efforts of the museum institution seems largely to have become a burden rather than an asset, whereas the temporary exhibition is viewed as the medium that holds the potential of drawing a large number of audiences. This tendency is followed by a growing number of freelance curators that work independently of institutions and consequently outside of museums with permanent collections. The expertise of the curator has changed from classical art historical knowledge and skills to knowledge of 'the state of the art' of the art scene and that of 'story telling' or generating narratives. This raises questions of the role of the curator both in and outside museums today, and of the qualifications, competences, skills and responsibilities of the curator.

On the level of exhibitions these changes are evident in the privileging of the thematic exhibition format over the chronological exhibition format, and the group show over the solo show. Classical art historical exhibition formats such as the monographic exhibition and the survey show are superseded by exhibitions that concentrate on thematic groupings of art works, often disregarding principles of chronology, history, style and medium in favour of staging connections or 'dialogues' of a thematic or formal nature between artworks. The *raison d'être* of the exhibition seems in general to be moving from that of generating knowledge to that of creating events and sensations, stressing the theatrical and spectacular qualities of artworks. The innovations in the field of exhibition aesthetics raise questions of what kinds of context that are being provided and what kinds of knowledge that are being produced in museum exhibitions, and how the audience is supposed to, and indeed given the option to, engage in this production.

The conference will address these three aspects of the problems raised by the staging of contemporary art in the museum within the framework of the history of the exhibition. As such the conference aims at discussing the specific problems related to the exhibition of art in a museal frame today, while providing bearing points for the writing of a history of the exhibition in a broader cultural context.

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Reference:

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