Cahiers de Mariemont, Vol. 44: The Mutliple

Royal Museum of Mariemont (Belgium)
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Dr Jean-Sébastien Balzat

The mutliple: hybridity at the crossroads of fields and practices (from 1950 to the present day)

The Royal Museum of Mariemont (Belgium) calls for papers on the topic of the "multiple" to be published in issue 44 of its annual journal Cahiers de Mariemont (thematic dossier).

Echoing volume 43 of the Cahiers de Mariemont dedicated to the Replicating Art, volume 44 focuses on multiple as a practice characteristic of the post-war period and which still accompanies and reflects the profound transformations of our societies today. As Michel Melot writes about the book: 'The "multiple" is neither a reproduction, nor a "copy" interchangeable with another. The category of "multiple" is therefore a hybrid between reproduction and a single original work' (https://www.cairn.info/revue-medium-2012-3-page-169.htm).

In the 19th century, the world of print made a singular place for the multiple by making the matrix (engraved wood, plaque, lithographic stone, etc.) the place of a plural birth of the work. This practice was to assert itself again at the end of the 1950s when innovations in production and distribution led to a hybridization between the work of art and the industrial object. The societal transformations brought about by the youth of the time, the accessibility of techniques and even the fall in the costs of automatic reproduction (the first Xerox photocopier dates from 1959), give hope for the possibility of reappropriation and diversion of the means of industrial production - in which artists could not intervene directly.

This potential for the dissemination of art to as many people as possible suggests to new creators a questioning of the commercial and/or cultural goods of the 'consumer society'. In 1959, Daniel Spoerri founded the MAT (Multiplication d'Art Transformable) editions in Paris with the desire to produce accessible art objects: each work being produced in 100 copies signed and singled out by the artist. The multiple will allow creators through 'artistic editing' to invest in the field of consumer objects to which the print world now largely belongs. Like Spoerri, many artists produce both artist's books as well as other multiples: either by creating their own structures or in collaboration with book publishing houses, design or art galleries ... In Antwerp Guy Schraenen, thanks to his structure 'Archive for Small Press & Communication', will not only edit, create and distribute 'artist's books' but also bring together many of the multiples produced between the 1960s and 1980s. According to Schraenen, this general conception of multiplication and diffusion 'had as a characteristic the use or the diversion of usual or industrial objects, also of works published on paper but always carried out with the same idea'.

As Marie-Ange Brayer, Rossella Froissart and Valérie Nègre remind us, the practice of the multiple

is not, moreover, a topic of artists' production: it has also been found in the field of design since the 1950s (http://journals.openedition.org/perspective/14627). It has the double effect of the artialization of everyday objects and their defunctionalization blurring the boundaries that separate the applied arts and design from those of works of art. While their identification, reception and analysis prove more difficult, they are not sufficient to understand the relative blindness of art criticism for creators and hybrid objects from the fields of design and the applied arts.

In her essay "Le Multiple d'artiste, Histoire d'une mutation artistique: Europe-Amérique du Nord de 1985 à nos jours" (2010), Océane Delleaux reports a renewed interest in the multiple from the 1990s, after a period of disaffection in the previous decade. In 2006, the eponymous exhibition and publication of MoMA Eye on Europe: Prints, Books, & Multiples, 1960 to Now aimed to give the broadest possible vision of the practice in all its forms. However, as Laurence Corbel underlines, the choices of the curators, Deborah Wye and Wendy Weitman, testify not only to a great disparity of practices and supports, but also to a lack of consensus on what the notion and the definition of 'multiple' covers for both researchers and creators (http://journals.openedition.org/perspective/1280).

Already undermined by the multiple and variety of prints or copies it offers, the unique work is now confronted with digital dispersion: the very recent use of the Blockchain and that of non-fungible tokens (NFT) appear as so many attempts to keep this aura a little longer. The most puzzling example is undoubtedly Everydays: The First 5,000 days by Beeple, a work bringing together, as in a digital amateur cabinet, 5,000 images created by the artist, and made accessible to the purchaser under certain conditions.

Notwithstanding, it is clear that the multiples have often been a matter of technical and material accessibility, in part a corollary of the socio-cultural, industrial and technological developments that they explore and question. Already in the 1970s, many artists have explored various media: such as the vinyl record Reconstitution De Chansons Qui Ont Été Chantées À Christian Boltanski Entre 1944 Et 1946 (1971), or the Bicentenaire kit by Jacques Monory and Michel Butor (1976)), which is a chest of drawers made in 300 copies in blue altuglas containing a book, original serigraphs as well as various emblematic objects of American civilization.

Likewise, the accessibility of the various audiovisual formats in the 1980s and 1990s held promises for creators similar to those conveyed by books in the 1960s. Thus Thierry De Duve produced, between 1976 and 1984, a triptych entitled Adrienne et le journal and composed of video tapes made in super-8, a novel and a Pièce sonore pour walkman in 12 audiotapes. Jean-Michel Othoniel writes and produces the content of the CD-ROM A Shadow in your Window (1995), which is an interactive alphabet primer drawing on his images, videos and writings: printed in 500 copies this work, which he considers as 'the most important and the least expensive', was produced with the aim of 'reaching a different audience than art' (https://www.chronicart.com/digital/l-art-et-l-artiste-projetes-sur-cd-rom/).

Because it is designed more for the private than for the public space, because it also authorizes all experiments, one can wonder if the multiple does not find in this domestication of materials and especially of the means of industrial production that are 3D printers and laser cutters so many opportunities for expression. Fruit and miscarriage of our European industrial culture, is it today capable of revealing or even questioning the ins and outs of global cultural industries?

This volume invites researchers, artists and publishers to question this art form, reflecting not only on the evolution of the status of the work of art and that of the artist, but also on the way in which these works use and sometimes divert the most recent means of production and distribution, in particular since the 2000s. Here is a non-exhaustive list of avenues for reflection to explore:

- Historical perspective: origins, developments and continuity of a practice
- The status of the work and the artist
- The 'multiple' and the democratization of art
- The standards and values of society called into question
- The challenges and means of production and dissemination of the 'multiple'
- Positioning of creators vis-à-vis traditional materials and techniques and innovations
- Distribution networks
- The roles and functions of the various actors of the multiple: publishers and creators
- Place of artists' books in the contemporary multiple

Proposals are to be sent to the editor of the Cahiers de Mariemont, Jean-Sébastien Balzat (jean-sebastien.balzat@musee-mariemont.be) by September 15th 2021. They must include a summary (2,000 to 3,000 characters), a provisional title, a selected bibliography and a short biography of the author (2 or 3 lines). The submitted article must contain a maximum of 30,000 characters (spaces included) preceded by a summary and followed by 10 keywords. The submissions are expected by January 15th 2022.

Dr Sofiane Laghouati, qualified researcher and curator of modern and contemporary books, Royal Museum of Mariemont
Dr Jean-Sébastien Balzat, scientific editor, Cahiers de Mariemont

The Cahiers de Mariemont : Established in 1970, the Cahiers de Mariemont is the annual journal of the Royal Museum of Mariemont (Belgium). The journal is peer-reviewed. It aims at promoting the study of the Museum's rich collections, and also publishes articles, mainly in French and English, about a wide range of subjects from various disciplines including Ancient Mediterranean art and archaeology, extra-European arts, Belgium's regional archaeology and history, precious books, decorative art, and museology. Its dossiers deal with current research themes in both transversal and cross-disciplinary perspectives.
Issues 1 to 40 is available on the open access academic platform Persée (https://www.persee.fr) by the end of 2020.

Reference:

CFP: Cahiers de Mariemont, Vol. 44: The Mutliple. In: ArtHist.net, Jul 17, 2021 (accessed Oct 6, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/34627>.