Mythmaking Eastern Europe: Art in Response (Zurich, 18 Oct 12)

Zurich, Oct 18, 2012

Mateusz Kapustka

Mythmaking Eastern Europe: Art in Response

International Symposium

Institute of Art History at the University of Zurich in cooperation with the Swiss Institute for Art Research SIK-ISEA in Zurich

Thursday, 18th October 2012

University of Zurich
Karl Schmid-Strasse 4, 8006 Zurich
Room KO2-F-152
(entrance also through the main hall of the UZH, Rämistrasse 71)

Organization: Mateusz Kapustka

Concept:The conference explores the issue of collective imagination of Eastern European art after 1945. Art history from this region, freed from political burdens after 1989, is an essential part of present scholarship with its new comprehensive methodical approaches and contemporary claims for global perspectives. The presence of Eastern European art in the discourse of the post-hegemonic, post-colonial and transnational art history is, however, constantly obstructed by such barriers as e.g. the myth of a collective identity of artists active behind the (former) Iron Curtain. These are nowadays often labeled with an avant-garde mark of anti-socialist nonconformists and hence their artistic oeuvre appears immediately as a struggle for freedom. This conference initiates a critical debate on this topic within the Swiss research community together with art historians from Eastern Europe and touches upon the problem of historical compromising attitudes and different systematic alliances of artistic personalities and milieus with state authorities. Also treated will be nationalistic tendencies in art and art promotion after 1989. The presentations by researchers from Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, Hungary, Slovenia, Serbia as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina offer a multifocal and transnational insight into the contemporary reception of Eastern European art. Thus, the conference contributes to the current general debate on the present borders and aims of art history as an academic discipline searching for its new identity beyond politicized geographical concerns.

Konzept: Die Tagung ist dem Problem der Homogenisierung der heutigen Vorstellung zur Kunst

Osteuropas nach 1945 gewidmet. Befreit nach der Wende von 1989 von politischen Bürden der totalitären Ideologien, bildet die osteuropäische Kunstgeschichte einen wesentlichen Teil der heutzutage methodisch übergreifenden und global angestrebten akademischen Disziplin. Die Präsenz der Kunst Osteuropas auf der aktuellen Bühne der posthegemonialen, postkolonialen und transnationalen Kunstgeschichte stösst jedoch auf Hindernisse, wie v.a. in Form des Mythos der kollektiven Identität der hinter dem (ehemaligen) Eisernen Vorhang aktiven Künstler. Diese werden mit einem avantgardistischen Label des antisozialistischen Nonkonformismus versehen, die künstlerische Tätigkeit wird somit en bloc zum Freiheitskampf erklärt. Die Tagung setzt sich als Ziel, in der schweizerischen Forschungslandschaft zusammen mit den osteuropäischen KunsthistorikerInnen eine gemeinsame kritische Debatte zu diesem Thema mit Berücksichtigung der historischen Kompromisseinstellungen und systematischen Allianzen der Kunstszene mit dem staatlichen Apparatus wie auch mit den nationalistischen Tendenzen nach 1989 zu initiieren. Mit Präsentationsthemen aus Polen, Tschechien bzw. Tschechoslowakei, Rumänien, Slowenien, Ungarn wie auch Bosnien und Herzegovina wird ein transnationaler und doch differenzierter Blick vorgeschlagen, mit dem die aktuelle Rezeption der Kunst Osteuropas erneut in eine allgemeine Diskussion des kunsthistorischen Faches über seine heutige Grenzen und Ziele vorgeschlagen werden kann.

PROGRAM:

9.00-9.30
Coffee and Welcome

9.30-10.00
Mateusz Kapustka (Zurich): Collective Eastern Europe in the Present Discourse of Art History – Opening Remarks

Chair: Beat Wyss (Berlin / Karlsruhe)

10.00-11.00
Piotr Juszkiewicz (Poznan): Farewell to a Myth. On Close Relationships between Modernism and Totalitarianism

Regardless of the changing historical situation in particular countries of the Eastern bloc, modernism is usually referred to as a distinct artistic choice implying moral and political protest against totalitarian Stalinist power in favor of the cultural and democratic values of the West. Such a myth of modernism as a tool of resistance has shaped the worldview and intellectual perspective of many artists and scholars from Central and Eastern Europe and can be found even in those studies whose authors realize that in some Eastern bloc countries modern art was officially tolerated and manipulated by the regime. This paper shows how “Socialist Modernism” – a specific combination of modernism and many aspects of communist ideology, which impacted culture of Central and Eastern European Countries after the WWII, confronts this mythical modernism with its own historical and ideological foundation and political history of the region.

– Coffee break –

11.15-12.15

Milena Bartlova (Prague): Supporting Insecure Identities: Political Engagement of Czechoslovak Art History

Czech and Czechoslovak art histories were engaged from their beginning in the 1860s in the discourse of constructing the Czech (and later Czechoslovak) national ethnic (and later state) identities. German speaking scholars, in turn, retaliated. Demarcation lines between Czech and German culture were drawn in actual artistic production and in art historical research, both with direct response to actual politics. After the expulsion of the Germans in the aftermath of WWII, Czechoslovak art historical discourse continued its political engagement in the Cold War situation. As a result, art historical “mythology of the nation” retains its strong position today.

– Lunch –

Chair: Akos Moravanszky (Zurich)

13.30-14-30
Liviana Dan (Sibiu): Romanian Classical Avant-garde and the Modern Tyranny of Images

The presentation will focus on the way in which the Romanian classical avant-garde influenced Romanian contemporary artists after the fall of communism by changing their approach towards the mechanisms of art and in starting constructing projects rather than simply showing or exhibiting their works. In the context of this topic, the paper will demonstrate that through the graphic arts of the classical avant-garde, propagandistic art emerged. How this type of graphic arts will also determine surpassing propaganda and the tyranny of images will be discussed.

14.30-15.30
Zdenka Badovinac (Ljubljana): “Institutional Critique”

The aim of the paper is to speak about Eastern European art from the viewpoint of my own work as a curator, and to do so by using the term ‘institutional critique’. I want to point out how universal terms, such as institutional critique, are problematic from the point of view of our space. Contextualizing terminology seems particularly important today, when different anthologies and exhibitions are being made on the premises of universal terms. This is probably unavoidable, which makes it all the more necessary to problematize such terms. The same goes for auxiliary labels that only regionally prefix universal terms. In this respect, the term ‘institutional critique’ seems more appropriate than the label Eastern European institutional critique. The latter would designate the particularity of something that has already been designated as universal. In this sense, the part modified as Eastern automatically sounds subordinate to the status of the general, the canonic, the over-determining – although it is, in fact, only “Western”.

– Coffee break –

Chair: Annika Hossain (Zurich) and Jörg Scheller (Zurich)

16.00-16.30
Daria Ghiu (Bucharest): Mythmaking Eastern Europe on a National Scale: The Legacy of Constantin Brancusi in Romania

In 2009, within the context of the Venice Biennale, the artist Alexandra Croitoru together with the art historian Stefan Tiron submitted a proposal that was never exhibited. Taking the Romanian Pavilion as the perfect place for a national representation of the artist as a ‚national hero', they virtually dedicated it to Constantin Brancusi. Focusing on the infinite ways of ‚using' Brancusi and his legacy today, Croitoru and Tiron reflected upon this project as a ‚model of a complex cultural ecosystem which has to be fueled and preserved', imagining the Pavilion as a place of active remembrance. How do we deal with Brancusi's legacy today? Why is he still a controversial character? How do we perceive his ambiguous personality – a synthesis of a Western and Eastern spirit – besides the entire system of myths created around himself? The long relation between Brancusi and the Venice Biennale will also be investigated.

16.30-17.00
Kinga Bodi (Budapest): The Heritage of „Cultural Centres" in Hungary. Andreas Fogarasi at the Venice Biennale in 2007

In 2007 Andreas Fogarasi (b. 1977) represented Hungary at the Venice Biennale and his project entitled Kultur und Freizeit (Culture and Leisure) won the Golden Lion Award for the best Pavilion. Fogarasi created six video films dealing with the problem and history of former cultural centres from a contemporary perspective. The origin of cultural centres dates back to the 19th century with the idea to create places of leisure, education and culture for the workers from different factories. However, cultural centres have become rapidly quite popular among the people and opened for the whole society. During Socialism cultural centres played an important part of the socialist cultural propaganda and education. After the change of the regime some have been closed, some have become abandoned, but some still exist as hobby clubs, cinemas or underground gallery spaces. Instead of documentaries, Fogarasi combined in his short films texts, pictures, sounds together and touched issues like origins, heritage, tradition, public monuments, historical myth, continuity, timelessness, and the idea of a „nation". Thus, he focused on a common phenomenon of the whole former Eastblock during the Cold War.

– Coffee break –

17.15-17.45
Seraina Renz (Zurich/Belgrade): "Art and Revolution" – The Student Cultural Center Belgrade as Place between Affirmation and Critique

The paper elaborates on the Student Cultural Center (SKC) in Belgrade as a place for artistic production and its specific position in the cultural life of Yugoslavia during the 1970s. These Centers were established in all capital cities of former Yugoslavia after 1968, the time of severe student protests. They were linked to the universities and were often run by former leaders of student protests. In these terms, they served as a means of institutionalizing and canalizing potentially subversive forces. In the same time, the institution of SKC in Belgrade became the place of the most advanced art production and of exchange with artists from Europe and the US. By the example of works by Raša Todosijevi? the paper will show how problems of culture and art production in Yugoslavia were addressed. These examples will demonstrate how the (Western) notion of "dissident" artists is totally inadequate to grasp the complex relationship between the state and the young artistic generation.

17.45-18.15
Mirela Ljevakovic (Florence/Munich): Art in “No Man’s Land”: Case Study Bosnia and Herzegovina

Globalization and political developments caused an immense explosion of public interest in emerging art markets outside of the contemporary art scene in Europe and the US. Since the late 1990s and the collapse of communism, new territories have struggled to recreate their national heritage and artistic identities within a global context. The proposed paper reviews the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina which has developed along a very different way because of the tragic war which raged in the region. The cultural policy of the country and current institutional organization will be the main focus of this paper. The nationalist movements of the country have stimulated a very intense and dynamic response of artists, during and in the post-war period, but at the same time national heritage agendas have failed to support this contemporary artistic production. Some major museums and galleries have been closed recently and there are no attempts to establish any stabile platforms or funds.

– Closing Discussion –

For more information please see:

http://www.khist.uzh.ch/lehrstuehle/neuzeit/res/conf/zurich12g.html

Reference:
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