Historiography of Modernism and the Avant-garde, Einstein, Klee, Walser

Berne, Switzerland, Nov 7–09, 2013
Deadline: Dec 15, 2012

Andreas Michel

Historiography of Modernism and the Avant-garde: New Perspectives on Carl Einstein, Paul Klee and Robert Walser

Since the 1980s, there has been a growing interest in rewriting the history of literature, the arts, and the humanities by placing it within a broader cultural context (see, e.g., Arnulf Nünning, Geschichte der englischen Literatur; Linda Hutcheon & Mario J. Valdés, Rethinking Literary History; Alain Vaillant, L'histoire littéraire). In many respects the eras of modernism and the historical avant-garde provide rich terrain for such an endeavor. Among the points of departure are approaches to transnationality and cultural transfer (nation and nationalism, racial memory, colonialism and postcolonialism), the dialogue of the arts and other disciplines, the reciprocal effects of text and image, as well as the increasing proximity of social history (historicization of literary communication) and aesthetic-theoretical approaches.

An international conference scheduled for 7-9 November 2013 in the Zentrum Paul Klee (Bern) co-organized by the Carl-Einstein-Gesellschaft, the Zentrum Paul Klee and the Robert Walser Zentrum, will focus on this question of historiography. C. Einstein (1885-1940), P. Klee (1879-1940) and R. Walser (1878-1956) are not only ideal contemporaries of modernism and the avant-garde; they also embody in exemplary fashion the spirit of this new historiography, partly on account of their uncertain national identity between the Germanic and the Romance worlds.

That Einstein and Klee were in contact with one another has been documented. Most notably, Klee and the Blue Rider are the focus of the chapter "Die romantische Generation" ("The Romantic Generation"), which Einstein included under this rubric only in the third edition of his seminal work Die Kunst des XX. Jahrhunderts (1931). In that work, he sought to provide a new interpretation of the art of the Blue Rider through the prism of surrealism, as well as championing a method of writing history that was anchored in the viewpoint of the present.

Even if current scholarship presents no evidence of actual contact between Einstein and Walser or Klee and Walser, affinities between their respective oeuvres, especially in the processes of creative production, may be detected. Comparative approaches with respect to the experimental prose of the two authors are undoubtedly worthwhile, as are investigations of the influence of painting and the visual arts on literary techniques of modernism and the avant-garde.

Presentations dealing directly with the relationships between Einstein, Klee and/or Walser are

most welcome. Fresh contributions on any of the three individual authors are likewise of interest; these should, however, relate to the general historiographical discussion and/or concentrate on an analysis of literary and artistic procedure.

Please submit proposals by 15 December 2012 to the three committee members of the Carl-Einstein-Gesellschaft, Nicola Creighton, Andreas Michel und Hubert Roland: n.creighton@qub.ac.uk, michel@rose-hulman.edu, hubert.roland@uclouvain.be

Proposals will be considered in consultation with Michael Baumgartner (Zentrum Paul Klee) and Reto Sorg (Robert Walser-Zentrum).

Reference:

CFP: Historiography of Modernism and the Avant-garde, Einstein, Klee, Walser. In: ArtHist.net, Oct 18, 2012 (accessed Nov 19, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/4020>.