(Un)mapping Infrastructures of Modern Art (Poznan, 8-10 Oct 25)

Poznan, Polen, Oct 8–10, 2025
Deadline: Feb 1, 2025

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(Un)mapping Infrastructures of Modern Art, IV: Infrastructures of supporting travels and exhibiting modernism transnationally (1940s-1990s).

The upcoming workshop is part of a series guided by an international art history research group focusing since 2020 on the infrastructures of modern art from a transnational perspective. The original meaning of “infrastructure” refers to stable and enduring substructures or underpinnings of society and are often technical in nature as well as run by the state. As such, they safeguard nodal points of support and connectivity. As the development of international artistic networks evolved into a predominant goal for modern artists, collectors, dealers and displaying institutions over the 20th century, the conditions of these networks merit a closer look. The term infrastructures not only refers to technical support, but also – as referenced throughout by institutional critique – to ways of making some things possible or conceivable of including certain areas and individuals while not others. Applied to the arts, the term highlights underlying structures for institutions such as museums, exhibition venues, biennials, private collections, production sites (studios, workshops, laboratories, academies, art schools) and universities but also funding of institutions, publishers, and other (academic) authorities that contributed to relevant discourses, networks, and the publishing of art, (un)mapping their transnational relations.

In the series of “(Un)mapping Infrastructures” (former workshops in Munich, Zagreb and Budapest) the focus of this workshop will turn from objects to travelling subjects: to infrastructures which connected and financially supported artists from places elsewhere as well as related strategies of exhibiting art from 1945 to the1990s. As travelling and artistic exchange were transformed for example through structures like UNESCO, private foundations and state funding to form a continuing bedrock of artistic existence, the conditions of promoting artistic production differed widely. Residency programs such as in West-Berlin (funded by the Ford Foundation) in 1963 were inaugurated to project Western ideas across the Iron Curtain. When Ibrahim El-Salahi travelled to the US in 1962, he was funded by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. Artists from the African continent like Uche Okeke from Nigeria also travelled through grants, as he and others were given opportunities by a state program to attend the Slade school in London. Afro-American artists were supported to travel to the African continent and elsewhere by the Julian Rosenfeld Foundation and the Harmon-Foundation. A travelling exhibition program was launched by UNESCO in the 1950s, and the range of travel widened to former colonized countries in the 1960s. As at the same time artist’s residency programs and cultural policies where introduced to a mind-set of competing Cold War political systems until the long 1970s, artist’s support and the promotion of

exhibitions grew into an infrastructure that has definitely shaped our ideas about modern art.
Since the end of WW II artist's travel has been part of cultural diplomacy, intertwined with what is now referred to as nation-branding, and has nurtured far-reaching aims of international understanding and ideological influence. Artists from the so-called Eastern Bloc undertook trips and residencies within 'people's democracy' countries. Those who managed to get passports were also able to take advantage of scholarship opportunities in West Berlin offered by the German Academic Exchange Service ("DAAD"). There they met artists from Western countries, fraying the Iron Curtain to some extent. Cultural institutes of Western countries also played an important role in Eastern Bloc countries, often becoming enclaves of subversive activities and liberty, such as the Austrian Cultural Forum in Warsaw which had its own exhibition space. This expression of solidarity to artists from 'people's democracies' clearly shows that the myth of the Iron Curtain's impenetrability should be called into question, and solidarity programs be understood as a soft support infrastructure.
We would like to emphasize that infrastructures of supporting and exhibiting constantly intertwine state perspectives with private ones (Cupers/Meier 2020 place them between Statehood and Subjecthood). The patronage of private companies and foundations was often on behalf of national institutions during this period, or could be read as semi-official. While Western infrastructures tended to be critically questioned as exclusive with the rise of institutional critique in the 1960s, many countries feeling a lack of infrastructures in the arts emphasized their enhancing potential. Opinions diverged on private initiatives stepping in to organize long-term structural support for artists and exhibitions, for example in the history of Turkey's Art Biennial in Istanbul. The Cité internationale program in Paris started in 1965. Run by a foundation with additional state support, it was open on a subscription base to international organizations. From around 1900 and accelerating from the 1960s onwards, artist residency programs were inaugurated to enhance individual translocation and networking. They still form a major part of cultural politics and public cultural funding, in addition to private initiatives. For example, privately organized national pavilions at the Venice Biennial have increased in recent years.
These examples demonstrate that infrastructures in the field of art are not (and not always were) necessarily public, as discussed by scholars of infrastructure (Van Laak 2018, Van der Vleuten 2006). In the field of art infrastructures can also work to define a need, an urge for equality or a request for inclusion when built by a non-public entity. Private initiatives relating to public infrastructures can shed light on these political, cultural, or artistic needs and opportunities.

We are interested in how individual cases correspond to histories of institutional funding, travel grants, residencies, project funding (exhibitions, research trips). How inclusive have traveling exhibitions, festivals, competitions, foundations and transnational funding programs been? What purposes (open and hidden) drive the funding, what individual opportunities are removed from it? We welcome critical investigations into cases of contradicting perspectives between subjects and state, about investments that swing from private into stately structures, and individual artistic travel opportunities from programs that were not on the map until now.

Areas/themes to be considered include:
Exchange programs: state-supported programs that take place within/across political system boundaries/systems
The "third pillar of foreign policy": cultural funding structures as political structures; Foreign Office/Foreign Ministries/Ministries of Development, cultural diplomacy etc.;

Biennial funding inside or parallel to state organization; tensions between private and public - private foundations as international players in the field of art support
Supporting artists colonial/postcolonial (foreign institutes as neo-colonial institutions?)
Subversive promotion and political solidarity: solidarity exhibitions, resistance formats, islands of liberty in regimes, anti-apartheid, subversive promotion in West Germany: artists in exile
Forms of residencies and exhibitions

The workshop program will be enriched with visits to Poznan art institutions including the National Museum, Arsenal City Gallery, Jaroslaw Kozlowski Archive.

We welcome proposals that cross over from art historical perspectives to sociological, political history/diplomacy or economics. Case studies as well as papers providing a broader view and/or of a more reflective nature are requested. The talks should be no longer than 20 minutes. The workshop will be conducted in English. A publication is planned.

Please submit short proposals (maximum of 500 words) and a short CV to
Prof. Dr. Bärbel Küster (baerbel.kuester@khist.uzh.ch) and Prof. Dr. Marta Smolińska (marta.smolinska@uap.edu.pl) by February 1st 2025.
Selected applicants will be notified in March.

Reference:
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