American visual arts and resistance (Amiens, 21-23 May 25)

Université Picardie Jules Vernes, Amiens, France, May 21–23, 2025
Registration deadline: Jan 19, 2025

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Panel at the congrès de l'AFEA (French Association of American Studies).

Looking for contributions for the panel : "American visual arts and resistance: between expressing cultural independence and asserting plural identities"

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After spring 2024, a moment synonymous with a political storm in France, the Paris Olympic Games brought an enchanted interlude to the country, but also a surge of international cohesion and joy. The opening ceremony of these games, on July 26th, 2024, was an opportunity to assert values of equality, inclusion and diversity, embodied by opera singer Axel Saint-Cirel performing La Marseillaise, while choir singers held flags revisiting Freedom Woman Now, an artwork made by African American artist Faith Ringgold. Supplied by Dior, these flags, reproducing a 1971 work, highlighted the artistic creations of a now internationally-acclaimed artist, who spearheaded feminist and anti-racist resistance for several decades. Ringgold protested in front of the Whitney Museum in 1971, denouncing the lack of visibility of artists from ethnic and gendered minorities in American cultural institutions. Celebrated in France, thanks to the exhibition of her work at the Musée Picasso in 2023 and the tribute paid to her at the Dior fashion show in June 2024, Ringgold embodies intersectional struggles against social injustice and resistance to white, male and bourgeois cultural canons. Invoking the spirit of Ringgold, who died in April 2024, at a major international event such as the Olympic Games demonstrates that issues of representation and recognition retain a strong social and political significance in current debates about multiculturalism and national identities.
We need to keep in mind W. E. B. Dubois's famous statement at the 1926 NAACP conference: "All art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists". Indeed, by imagining alternative realities, generating emotions and conveying universalist messages, art can be seen as an instrument designed to support claims or to influence, for those who produce it, fund it and for the institutions making it accessible to civil society. In this context, every art form is subjected to cultural biases expressed at different levels, and it can validate canons or refuse them, be they ideological or aesthetic. Gilles Deleuze, in a 1987 lecture at La Fémis, described art as "that which resists", explaining that "every act of resistance is not a work of art, although in a certain way it is" and that "every work of art is not an act of resistance and yet, in a certain way, it is". Whether it fits into a canon or rebels against established norms, art can open spaces to challenge the world it

exists in. But what is art’s real challenging power, when we bear in mind that today's visual arts must be understood in terms of both market logic and soft power, in a network of international influence in which the United States plays a leading role?
This panel will analyze the specificities of art in the United States. If it now occupies a dominant position in the world market, how can it be both a space for resistance and a source of influence? To what extent does American art partake in a process of obedience and adherence, or opposition and independence? Is it due to its elaboration along the country's libertarian and revolutionary values? How was the American canon born? Was it formed and did it develop in opposition to or in continuity with European canons? Do the visual arts contribute to maintaining authorized uses of culture or to overturning an established order? While art has been a vehicle for American nationalism and patriotism at various moments in the country’s history, it has also been used to affirm certain counter-narratives of history, as in the case of decommissioned Confederate monuments.
Today, more than ever, contemporary art supports the politics of decolonization, both of museums and of the arts, and is rooted in resistance and/or activism, making certain minority or dissident voices heard – African-American, Native American, immigrant, feminist, LGBTQIA+, anti-militarist and pacifist, anti-capitalist, etc. Thus, we seek to explore what roles the key players in American art (artists, patrons, collectors, critics, collectors, museums, etc.), museum goers and the general public play in making art a space for dissent voices which can represent different struggles?
The aim of this workshop is to bring together scholars specializing in the visual arts, art history, museum studies and heritage questions, etc. to reflect on the visual constructions of national identity and Otherness in the United States, ideological discourses in relation to artistic practices, strategies of artistic resistance against the alienation of minority and dissident postures, and the policies and initiatives of cultural institutions to reinforce or rebalance an unequal system of representations.

Proposals for 300-word papers, along with a short bio-bibliographical note, should be sent to Anne Claire Faucquez (acfaucquez@gmail.com), Antonia Rigaud (antonia.rigaud@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr) and Clémentine Tholas (clementine.tholas@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr) no later than January 19, 2025.

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