

Special Issue: Displaying Engagement (The Political Exhibition in the 21st c.)

eikones - Center for the Theory and History of the Image

Deadline: Apr 1, 2025

Hella Wiedmer-Newman, University of Basel

Call for papers for a special Issue of 'The Political Exhibition in the 21st Century' "Displaying Engagement" published by eikones - Center for the Theory and History of the Image, University of Basel, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

If exhibitions have always had a specific political point of view, the rise of mass communication and the accelerated sensationalism of news events in the postmodern era have significantly influenced the ways in which this political dimension has been articulated through the exhibition apparatus. This process has, in turn, led to a different conceptualization—and consequently, presentation – of key themes such as memory, identity, history, as well as the very notion of the artwork and artistic research.

Having said that, we are interested in examining the ways temporary exhibitions have been political, or politicized, in the first quarter of the 21st century. Such an endeavour involves asking first and foremost what a political exhibition is, whether it is always explicitly politically engaged or whether it communicates its politics implicitly.

If it is an art exhibition, how do the exhibited works contribute to conveying the political message? How have contemporary politics been expressed and enacted through exhibitions? What role do funding structures, geopolitics, national narratives and actual party politics play in these exhibitions? And how do we de-center Eurocentric narratives about political exhibitions and think about them transculturally? The World's Fairs that characterised the 19th and early 20th centuries cemented harmful narratives about colonies, and the establishment of the UNHCR after the Second World War engendered a number of exhibitions advocating universal human rights. Are we still living in the human rights exhibition paradigm or are there new developments to chart? What are ways exhibitions are subversively political? What exhibitions have caused scandals or have been instrumentalized in the name of politics? Is it possible to outline a preliminary assessment of so-called "political" exhibitions over the past twenty five years?

We are seeking contributions to a future special issue on the political exhibition in the 21st century. We will select the most promising 8 to 10 articles and submit a proposal to a top-tier humanities journal.

Possible research areas include, but are not limited to:

- different kinds of political engagement in exhibition spaces

- challenges to the notion of what a political exhibition can be
- activism and politics
- memory, display and politics
- temporary exhibitions not only in institutional spaces
- exhibitions and their relationship to monuments and museums
- the role of funding in political exhibitions
- the impact of new communication strategies of political issues in the exhibition context
- audience and critical reception of political exhibitions
- politics and ideology in exhibitions: a transversal or a monolithic approach?
- didactics and affect

The editors invite scholars to provide a working title and research proposal (300 words maximum), together with a short bio (100 words maximum).

Please submit the materials to Hella Wiedmer-Newman (hella.wiedmer-newman@unibas.ch) and Veronica Locatelli (locatelli.veronica@spes.uniud.it) no later than April 1st, 2025.

Notice of acceptance: April 18, 2025.

--

Literature:

Adamou, Natasha, and Michaela Giebelhausen. (2023). *Reconstructing Exhibitions in Art Institutions*. London: Routledge.

Arnold-de Simine, Silke. (2013). *Mediating Memory and Western Civilization: Arts of Memory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Coates, Rebecca. (2013). "Curating Histories and the Restaged Exhibition." Paper presented at Interdiscipline: AAANZ Conference 2013, December.

https://aaanz.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Coates_Curating-histories.pdf.

Greenberg, Reesa, Bruce Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne. (eds.) (1996). *Thinking About Exhibitions*. London: Routledge.

Huyssen, Andreas. (2012). *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. New York: Routledge.

Iskin, Ruth (ed.) (2017). *Re-envisioning the Contemporary Art Canon*. London/New York: Routledge.

Lehrer, Erica. (ed.) (2011). *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pollock, Griselda and Joyce Zemans. (eds.) (2007). *Museums After Modernism: Strategies of Engagement*. Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons.

Ribalta, Jorge, in conversation with Stephanie Schwartz. (2009). "Documentary's Futures Past." *Photoworks*, no. 18.

<https://photoworks.org.uk/documentarys-futures-past-jorge-ribalta-conversation-stephanie-schwartz/>.

Staniszewski, Mary Anne (1998). *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

CFP: Special Issue: Displaying Engagement (The Political Exhibition in the 21st c.). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 25, 2025 (accessed Dec 29, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/44047>>.