

Saas-Fee Summer Institute of Art (Paris, 1–6 Sep 25)

Paris, France, hosted by Centre des Récollets and Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne., Sep 1–06, 2025

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From Dry to Wet Conceptualism in Cognitive Capitalism | SFSIA 2025

In celebration of ten years of programming, this year's Saas-Fee Summer Institute of Art in Paris, hosted by Centre des Récollets and Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, will look at alternative historical frameworks of Conceptual art in order to engage the newfound significance of this movement in the digital information age. To do this, we will introduce the novel category of "Wet" Conceptual art at a moment when the knowledge economy and the significance of mind, brain and consciousness have never been more important. While some earlier examples, such as Boris Groys's 1979 essay "Moscow Romantic Conceptualism" and the exhibitions Global Conceptualism at Queens Museum (1999) and Romantic Conceptualism at Kunsthalle Nurnberg (2007), attempted to question Conceptual art's limitations and blind spots, exposing its mystical and romantic roots as well as its inherent xenophobia, recent social, political, cultural and technological conditions have developed and accelerated the need for a new understanding of classically defined Conceptual art to combat the impending despotism of Big Data and a social media-generated consciousness industry.

In contrast to this new category "wet," we refer to classically defined Conceptual art as "dry." Dry Conceptual art emerged in the midst of the incorporation of Fordist industrial production in the 1960s and was a reaction against the massification of commercial objects it produced. It was characterized as being indexical, dry, nihilistic, and text-based. Wet Conceptual was also non-representational but additionally emotional, colorful, performative, fluid, poetic, funny, personal, material, feminist, afro-futurist, planetary, posthuman and, yes, sometimes painterly. For example, Adrian Piper's "Catalysis III" from 1970, in which she paraded through the streets of New York City carrying a "WET PAINT" sign, seemed an anomaly. Bas Jan Ader's "Primary Time" (1974), a performance piece that focuses on the simple act of eating, Martha Rosler's "Semiotics of the Kitchen" (1975), as well as notable works by artists of Black Arts Movement such as David Hammons's Spade (Power of Spade) (1969), in which his grease-smeared face and body were used to create life-size body prints, seemed oddly out of place in the context of works by the founders of Dry Conceptualism such as Joseph Kosuth and Sol Lewitt. As Mary Kelly stated in her retrospective analysis of Conceptual art at the National Gallery of Art Talks in 2002, "the analytic (dry) proposition of Kosuth needs to shift to a synthetic (flowing) mode which examines and interrogates the messiness of life itself." Although appearing slightly later than the heyday of Dry Conceptual art between 1965 and 1972, Kelly's Post-Partum Document (1973) combines stained diaper linings

with psychoanalytic contrived markings all enclosed in Perspex and provides one poignant example.

The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement, a contract drafted in 1971 by curator Seth Siegelaub with attorney Robert Projansky, was also prescient of the shift of interest away from the dematerialized object to the importance of immaterial labor in the creation of Conceptual art. These early rumblings form the foundation of the future artistic engagements needed to confront the excessive and freedom-suffocating immateriality of our digital moment in which a plethora of invisible forces, such as social media and Big Data, have created new phenomenological forms of neural-digital algorithmic govern-mentality. Concepts like mind and thinking must consider the effects the programming of artificial neural networks and their reliance on models of neural networks of the brain, as well as unsupervised machine learning resulting from the advent of ChatGPT with its potential to, according to French philosopher of technology Bernard Stiegler, make us stupid.

Of related importance is Timothy Leary's use of the word wetware. While the term had been around since the 1950s, Leary stated in his appendix to *Info-Psychology* (1976), "psychedelic neurotransmitters were the hot new technology for booting-up the 'wetware' of the brain." Here, wetware is the site of action for technologies, such as brain-computer interfaces and optogenetics, which may pose existential threats to our freedom in the future. "From Dry to Wet Conceptualism in Cognitive Capitalism" proposes that we require a new assemblage of 'wet' conceptual tools in order to develop new conceptual strategies to combat these evolving contemporary conditions.

Faculty

Saâdane Afif, Julieta Aranda, Nicolas Bourriaud, Gaëlle Choisne, Mathieu Copeland, Marieke Dittmar, Claire Fontaine, Sozita Goudouna, Jörg Heiser, Helen Hester, Warren Neidich (founder/director), Kameelah Janan Rasheed, Gregory Sholette, and Yann Toma.

Applications

Applications for SFSIA 2025 Paris are open to students, practitioners and scholars from the fields of art (including video, photography, installation and multimedia), art history, science and technology studies, philosophy, design, architecture, critical theory, cultural studies, film and media studies, and beyond. Please see our application (<https://sfsia.art/2025-paris/2025-paris-application/>) for more information.

About SFSIA

Saas-Fee Summer Institute of Art (SFSIA) is a nomadic, intensive summer academy with shifting programs in contemporary critical theory that stresses an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the relationship between art and politics. SFSIA originated in Saas-Fee, Switzerland in 2015 and then migrated to Berlin, Germany where it was hosted by Import Projects (2016) and Spike (2017-2019). Additional programs have been hosted by Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles; Performance Space New York, The Brooklyn Rail, Residency Unlimited, Creative Time HQ and Montez Press Radio in New York City; sonsbeek2024 in Arnhem, The Netherlands; and Maison Suger and Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'homme in Paris. SFSIA was founded and is directed by Warren Neidich. Sarrita Hunn is the assistant director.

Please see our website (<https://sfsia.art/>) or contact info@sfsia.art for more information.

Reference:

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