

Calm Before the Storm? (New York, 27–29 Mar 2014)

New York, RSA, Mar 27–29, 2014

Deadline: Jun 1, 2013

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Calm Before the Storm? Creative Idleness, Artistic Inactivity, and Non-Inspiration

Complaints about artists, who fail to fulfill agreed commitments by delivering their works of art too late or not at all, are almost standard in the early modern period. But while aspects of productivity, industry or assiduity have often been recognized as a key to historical virtues and practices in the arts, the moment before the ultimate creative output has been mostly ignored. Due to the heterogeneous forms of artistic 'inactivity', such lapses of time require very subtle and differentiated evaluation, especially as the artist's periods of rest do not necessarily lead to a creative outburst or 'furor'. The perilous time of unproductiveness is therefore a moment of utmost importance in the artist's life and career.

Traditionally, phases of artistic calm are by no means connoted negatively, but rather are seen as a fundamental complement within the dialectics of 'otium' and 'negotium' (as strengthened by antique philosophers, medieval theologians or renaissance humanists). Especially in regard to the creative arts, many 'inactive' moments are moreover connected to typical activities of idleness, which were conventionally considered to lead to inspiration (such as dreaming, music making and amorous love, but also more bodily pleasures like alcohol consumption and sex). The ambivalent character of such periods, which seem to be 'unproductive', become even more evident by paying attention to anecdotes of artists filling their leisure-time with physical efforts such as sculpting 'per diletto' or by dedicating themselves to the 'fatica mentale' of philosophy or poetry. In contrast, artists might also fail to receive inspiration: the lack of creative energy, at times combined with the pressure of commissioners or colleagues, could also lead directly to an actual artistic crisis and despair.

What were contemporary benchmarks to judge such artistic 'failure' and the unproductive artist? How do artists rely on the concept of inactivity by presenting themselves as being otiose, and which aspects are consciously omitted or manipulated in early biographical accounts? In which way do early modern ideas of virtue and ethics, topics of biographical writing, theories of inspiration, fantasy, creation and also melancholy have an impact on the actual artistic life and its literary depiction? And how is the artist's repose reflected in actual artworks and how might they be connected with long-discussed concepts such as the 'non-finito'?

We explicitly encourage contributions from other disciplines treating analogous phenomenon, for instance the crises of the writer or the idleness of the philosopher in the early modern period. Please send abstracts of no more than 150 words and a CV of no more than 300 words to Jana

Graul (graul@khi.fi.it) and to Fabian Jonietz (fabian.jonietz@khi.fi.it) by June 1, 2013.

Reference:

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