

The Artwork Exposed (Amsterdam, 17-18 Apr 14)

Amsterdam, Apr 17-18, 2014

Deadline: Nov 3, 2013

Camelia Errouane, Amsterdam

Call for Papers

The Artwork Exposed: Politics and the Arts (1850-1914)

Seminar in Collaboration with the Royal Netherlands Historical Society (KNHG)

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, 17-18 April 2014

Organized by:

Camelia Errouane (University of Groningen)

Laura Prins (Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam)

Confirmed key-note speaker:

Michelle Facos (Indiana University Bloomington)

Artworks do not stand on their own: they are made for specific goals and presented in certain contexts; they are viewed and consumed by different persons and eventually they are analyzed by critics and historians. Within this social dynamic, the relationship between the arts and politics has always been complex: Governments of all colors have used and abused the arts throughout history, while individual artists, too, have used their works to get their political opinions across. This phenomenon gained special momentum during the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century and the development of various forms of (mass) communication. Interestingly enough, this was also the period when art history was born as a discipline.

In art history, the last decades have seen an overwhelming number of publications that provide political interpretations of a variety of artworks. It almost seems as if any visual object can be interpreted in ways inscribing it with political significance. Rather than adding yet more interpretations of individual works to the canon of art history, this symposium aims to take the topic further into more theoretical realms by asking questions that touch upon the fundamental relationship between art and politics. Artworks are in the first place visual objects. How can artworks and political history be related to each other, apart from using the first to illuminate the second – and vice versa? How are visual objects able to communicate a political message? How can historians deal with the divide between intention and perception when analyzing artworks? And whose intentions are we talking about: those of the artist, those of the commissioner, or those of the viewer? In this context, do aesthetic aspects, such as the style of a work, its medium and location matter? And if so, how?

The conference sets out to develop new ways of thinking about artworks as objects in networks of intention, interpretation and social relations that include artists, commissioners, critics and the audience. It is the explicit intention of the organizers to step beyond the well-known generalizations of art history, like artistic styles or schools, avant-garde and arrièrè-garde, modern and traditional. The event offers a platform that brings together young and established (art) historians who are studying the period 1850-1914, concentrating on European art in all media. We invite case-studies as well as theoretical papers; we particularly encourage case-studies from countries that are often excluded from official curricula, such as Scandinavia, Spain, Portugal or Poland.

In the Netherlands, the statement that “art is not the business of the government” by the Dutch politician Jan Rudolph Thorbecke (1798-1872) from 1862 has been a recurring argument in discussions about the relationship between politics and the arts, and in discussions about the role of artists and art institutions within society. Nonetheless, the Dutch government has been a formative factor in the arts, of which the construction of the Rijksmuseum is only the most famous example. The conference will include visits to the Rijksmuseum (1885) and to the Beurs van Berlage (1903). In the original design of both buildings artworks play an important role. The Rijksmuseum, the national museum of a country that portrays itself as essentially Protestant, is decorated with monumental mural paintings that were inspired by decorations of Roman Catholic churches, whereas the Beurs, former seat of the Amsterdam stock exchange, features tile tableaux about the exploitation of the working man and woman’s liberation. Both buildings stirred an enormous controversy when they were completed. Nowadays however, they are considered as hallmarks of Dutch architecture. These visits will allow us to discuss the relationship between arts and politics in the Dutch context.

Please send an abstract for a 20-minute paper (max. 300 words) and a cv to Camelia Errouane (c.f.errouane@rug.nl) and Laura Prins (LSEPrins@gmail.com) no later than 3 November 2013. Speakers will be notified by the end of December 2013.

It is the intention of the organizers to publish selected contributions. After the conference the participants will receive more detailed information about the publication.

Reference:

CFP: The Artwork Exposed (Amsterdam, 17-18 Apr 14). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 17, 2013 (accessed May 26, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/5945>>.