

The Turbulent Mind (Ghent, 16–17 May 14)

Ghent, Museum of Fine Arts, May 16–17, 2014

Deadline: Dec 13, 2013

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Call for Papers

The Turbulent Mind: Madness, Moods and Melancholy in the Art of the Nineteenth Century

Organised by the Research Platform XIX, the European Society for Nineteenth-Century Art and the Ghent Museum of Fine Arts, parallel with the Théodore Géricault exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent

On 7 May 1824, Eugène Delacroix wrote in his diary: "I do not care for reasonable painting at all. I can see that my turbulent mind needs agitation, needs to free itself, to try a hundred different things before reaching the goal whose tyrannous call everywhere torments me. (...) If I am not quivering like a snake in the hands of Pythoness, I am cold; I must recognize it and submit to it; and to do so is happiness."

In these lines, Delacroix evoked the age-old theme of the mad artist, tormented but divinely inspired, balancing on the verge of insanity and genius. For Delacroix himself, the idea certainly had a personal dimension, as is clear for instance from his self-identification with Michelangelo, the pre-eminent Old Master prototype of the disturbed but brilliant artist. But Delacroix's interest in the intersection of art and madness was hardly an isolated phenomenon. The rise of romanticism saw an exploding interest in the irrational, the disturbed, the insane, and its potential to liberate the arts, the mind, and even the world at large from the rigid chains of reason. In the 1820s, Théodore Géricault famously painted his series of monomaniacs, ten portraits of mentally ill men and women, and Delacroix himself not only depicted, in one of his historical genre paintings, a moody, brooding Michelangelo in his studio, but also painted the poet Torquato Tasso in the madhouse of St. Anna and other, similar scenes. Other artists looked for subjects in the same direction – the madness of Hugo van der Goes or the moods of Benvenuto Cellini – or used their art to give full expression to their own emotional anxieties or to address their

own mental troubles. Still others were inspired by scientific and pseudoscientific discoveries and made use of psychiatric, phrenological and physiognomic theories and documents to deal with themes of madness, moods and temperaments, or explored the category of the melancholic, an emotional state already associated with the artist by Giorgio Vasari but brought to the very centre of western culture by the overwhelming romantic feeling of loss following the age of reason.

On the occasion of the Théodore Géricault exhibition in the Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent (22 February - 25 May 2014; also in the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, 18 October 2013 - 26 January 2014), which will reunite three of the five surviving portraits of monomaniacs by Géricault, the museum joins forces with the European Society for Nineteenth-Century Art and the Research Platform XIX to organise this two-day conference. The theme of the conference parallels the steep rise of interest in recent years in the link between madness and art, and art and emotionality in general. The aim of the conference is to examine the significance of these new developments within the art historical discipline for the study of the art of the nineteenth century, a time when artists first deliberately turned for inspiration to the mentally deviant and first fully developed the idea of art as an expression of the emotional self. The conference will deal with both the myths of the artistic temperament and representations of madness, moods or melancholy. The conference organisers plan to publish a selection of the papers in an edited volume.

Please send proposals (max. 300 words) for a 20 minute paper (in English or French) for this conference to TheTurbulentMind@hotmail.com by 13 December 2013 at the latest. Selected speakers will be contacted in the course of January 2014.

Possible topics relating to artistic practice, the artistic temperament and the myth of the mad artist in the nineteenth century include:

- artists' (auto)biographies and the trope of the mad artist;
- artistic poses of madness and melancholy;
- the mad artist as a victim of society;
- psychiatry, phrenology, physiognomy and other (pseudo)sciences, and artists' use thereof;
- artists' interest in the mentally ill or the irrational;
- the idea of art as therapy or art and the idea of mental (self-) discipline;
- the expression and communication of emotions in art;
- ...

Possible topics relating to the representation of madness, moods or

melancholy in the nineteenth century include:

- themes of madness or irrationality in the arts;
- representations of hysteria;
- evocations of decadence, degeneration and fatigue;
- representations or evocations of melancholy as the quintessential nineteenth-century state;
- the mad or melancholic body;
- the artistic temperament and its representation in the visual arts;
- representations of (historical) artists and their mental states;
- (self-)portraits and the exploration of mental states;
- ...

Organising committee: Jan Dirk Baetens (Radboud University, Nijmegen), Rachel Esner (University of Amsterdam), Bruno Fornari (Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent), Jenny Reynaerts (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), Johan De Smet (Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent), Marjan Sterckx (Ghent University) and Cathérine Verleysen (Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent).

Scientific committee: Werner Adriaenssens (Royal Museum of Art and History, Brussels), Koen Brosens (University of Leuven), Maite van Dijk (Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam), Mayken Jonkman (RKD, The Hague), Herwig Todts (Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp), Francisca Vandepitte (Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Brussels), Filip Vermeylen (Erasmus University, Rotterdam), and Catherine de Zegher (Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent).

www.mskgent.be

www.werkgroep-xix.blogspot.be

www.esnaonline.wordpress.com (under construction)

Reference:

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