

Between Democracies 1989–2014 (Johannesburg, 13–15 Mar 15)

University of Johannesburg (Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture), South Africa,
Mar 13–15, 2015

Deadline: Jul 31, 2014

Karen von Veh, University of Johannesburg

Call for Papers

Between democracies 1989–2014: Remembering, narrating and reimagining
the past in Eastern and Central Europe and Southern Africa

Keynote speakers:

Prof Achille Mbembe, Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research
(Wiser)

Contemporary theoretical framework for the conference: South Africa
and Eastern and Central Europe

‘South Africa’ refers to a geographical location as well as to a constructed cultural space. In 1994, new ideological and political shifts in South Africa were entrenched by a neo-liberal democracy. Artists and art historians have in recent years revisited the contestations interconnected with the ideas of a racialised and gendered political landscape and the renegotiation of constructed social spaces. Post-apartheid South Africa from 1994 to 2014 is marked by the initially jubilant ideals of nation-building strategies such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the notions of the Rainbow Nation and the African Renaissance as vehicles to grapple with the social constructions of identities in a ‘new’ South Africa. These strategies reflected a rationalisation of the post-colonial recovery with a sense of self and place and were premised on the assumptions of interchange, mixing, inter/transculturations, hybridity and creolisation.

In the 1990s, paradigm shifts were noted in the international mainstream art arena. New York was no longer the international art capital, Eastern and Central European artists were now more visible as a result of the end of the Cold War and South African art was awarded several international platforms. But many South African artists

continued their artistic practices of the 'struggle years'. They were also under enormous pressure both at home and from abroad to visually embody the political changes, as well as to explore innovative approaches in their art. Art produced in the public domain of South Africa is still located in the political place of unresolved identities and remains in search of a recovery of self. Historical and political disruptions of transforming contexts periodically propelled artists into spaces of contention and disjuncture in continuing and discontinuing artistic practices. Contemporary artworks in the national South African context encompass representations of place, memory, active ideological forces in society, new public places and acculturated places of intermingling and negotiation.

The 'post-communist condition' is not restricted to the space of the former Eastern Europe, but it also affects 'the former West'. It has become at least a pan-European phenomenon, if not a global one, taking into account the pervasiveness of capitalist relations in the present world order. Instead of defining a clearly regulated geographical space, the expression has rather referred to a heterogeneous and conflicting discursive terrain. The collapse of the Berlin Wall prompted a reimagining of the formerly divided Europe on the grounds of different political imaginaries, economies and bio-political regimes. This process has been regarded as dependent on a shifting temporal logic ("back from the future", as Boris Groys puts it), pertaining to a post-utopian attitude, given the prospective dimension of communist utopia. Artists and curators revisited the logic of modernity and explored its unrealised possibilities (Svetlana Boym), while at the same time questioning contested territorial marks and processes of un-belonging. From a socialist perspective, the recent crisis of global capital requires a reconsideration of social relations constructed by the Soviet imaginary, proposing alternative economies of knowledge and desire and different imagined collectives.

In relation to temporality, issues of identity and reconstruction of the private and the collective selves became central themes in the recently unmarked and de-territorialised places of the 'former East'. Thus, the question of coping with the socialist past and its heritage has been an important political issue in much of the art after 1989, overlapping issues of gender, ethnicity, class and national belonging. It has been dealt with primarily by means of a psychoanalytical approach, for which terms such as trauma, amnesia and desire pervaded art historical explanation of recent shifts in those societies and their art. Equally important is the post-colonial perspective, according to which the reconstruction of collective identities corresponding with a shifting political and social imaginary and the gradual disruption of the social fabric in an unstable political

milieu are key factors in understanding many of the artistic concerns with their present, as well as, and especially with their past. In this respect, an "aesthetics of post-history", as envisaged by Irit Rogoff in order to deal with the German art after the Holocaust, may be considered in relation to the ways in which collective and personal memory of the communist past is represented, performed, its former narratives and certitudes critically destabilised or its effigies commercialised in recent political gestures and artistic practices.

Sub themes:

- uses and limitations of postcolonial theory in art historical methodologies
- constructs of place and political disruption
- the discourse of memory and commemoration
- transforming ideologies
- new contexts of acculturation
- acculturated places of intermingling and negotiation
- negotiating postcolonial identities
- national (re)constructions and their visual representations

Send a 300 word abstract to: Judy Peter (PhD), eesa@uj.ac.za

Deadline for abstracts: 31 July, 2014

The conference proceedings will be published in a peer reviewed volume.

Convenors:

Judy Peter (University of Johannesburg, South Africa)

Cristian Nae (George Enescu" University of Arts, Iasi, Romania)

Ljiljana Kolečnik (Institute of Art History, Croatia)

Karen von Veh (University of Johannesburg, South Africa)

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