Feminism and Art History's New Domesticities (Birmingham, 3-4 Jul 15)

University of Birmingham, UK, Jul 3–04, 2015
Deadline: Feb 15, 2015

Jo Applin

House, Work, Artwork: Feminism and Art History's New Domesticities

Keynote speakers: Mignon Nixon (Courtauld Institute of Art, London) and Julia Bryan-Wilson (University of California, Berkeley)

This conference is motivated by the premise that it is appropriate for feminist art history to re-visit and newly configure theoretical, methodological and political debate around modernist, postmodernist and contemporary artistic practice in relation to the domestic. Having been a significant focus of 1980s feminist art-historical scholarship, domesticity has since been eclipsed in feminist analysis by focus on corporeality, subjectivity and globalisation, amongst other significant concepts. This conference seeks to evaluate the intellectual and political gains, and potentially losses, to be made from investing once again in existing feminist theoretical frameworks, including the materialist, the psychoanalytical and the postcolonial. It also invites contributions framed by alternative or more recent modes of feminist enquiry, including those constituted through the framework of artistic practice itself. The sexual politics of domestic, artistic, and scholarly labour, productive agency, and the obedient or disobedient domestic imaginary might constitute one focus. However, these are by no means the only or defining parameters of this conference’s aim to engage with a feminist politics and practice of home making and unmaking since the late nineteenth century.

This conference is particularly timely in the light of art and art history's 'new' domesticities. These include queer art history's turn towards the domestic as a site for imagining, making and inhabiting space within or without the hetero-normative, and recent art-historical and curatorial projects focusing on modern and contemporary art practice and the home, but in which the question of feminism is downplayed in favour of more generalised concepts of subversion, labour and belonging. More broadly, the rise of the 'new domesticity' within popular culture continues to proliferate, such as the cult of the cupcake, knitting groups, home-baking television programmes and, more generally, 1950s 'housewife' design aesthetics. Contrast, for example, the discursive de-politicisation of today's home-making in art and mass culture with the actively feminist domestic ambivalence of 1970s artistic practice, exemplified by Martha Rosler's Semiotics of the Kitchen (1975) and Laurie Simmons' Early Color Interiors (1978). Finally, we might remember that these new domesticities and today's artistic and art-historical practices take place in spite of, and as a product of, ongoing global, domestic, social and economic inequalities, violence, and oppression, even in the so-called 'post-feminist' West.

This two-day conference invites proposals from art historians of up to 500 words for papers of 30 minutes. Proposals should be sent to Dr Francesca Berry (Department of Art History, Film and Visual Studies, University of Birmingham) at f.berry@bham.ac.uk and Dr Jo Applin (Department of History of Art, University of York) at jo.applin@york.ac.uk by Sunday 15th February 2015. Please also attach a brief biographical note and institutional affiliation.

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Reference:

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