Issue: Unmasking the Persona (Kunstlicht, Journal for Art History, Visual Cultur)

Deadline: Apr 14, 2015

Jesse van Winden

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While notions of the artist as a solitary genius have been out of date since the passing of Romanticism, the title continues to connote ingenuity, eccentricity, and otherworldly inspiration. The image of the artist as an individual of exceptional vision and allure endures, provoking interest in the artist ‘behind' the work. Recognizing the agency of this appeal, both within the clear frame of artistic production and in so-called public life, artists have employed their ‘selves' as raw material – as an instrument or a medium – to present, stage, modify, amplify, fictionalize, or critique. When consistent over time, such self-presentations imply the creation of a persona: a fusion of natural identity and artificiality, role-playing and theatrical enactment.

Persona is certainly not exclusive to visual arts: stage performers and celebrities often exhibit highly developed personas, and literary personas offer another perspective altogether. Carl Jung has defined persona as any "individual's system of adaptation to, or the manner he assumes in dealing with, the world." Persona is art historically relevant because it enables the investigation of public appearances as performative and personas within and outside the aesthetic frame as surrogate works of art. Often a continuity exists between the artist's persona and the oeuvre, which makes the artist's self-presentation all the more compelling and relevant.

When Andy Warhol famously stated, "I want to be a machine" in a 1963 interview, he merged the normally disparate realms of non-fictional, everyday life with the work of art. Warhol used his presence as an artwork and his identity as a form of branding, connecting his very self to the notion of depersonalization – an important theme in his work. The

artist became the performance. This tendency can be observed throughout the course of a persona-based history of art in which personality and appearance form an artistic medium, as employed consciously or unconsciously by pioneers like Warhol, Salvador Dalí, Yves Klein, Joseph Beuys, and Valie Export, and further developed by artists as diverse as Cindy Sherman, Jeff Koons, Andrea Fraser, Marina Abramovi?, Christoph Schlingensief, and Banksy.

Furthermore, a persona may fulfill aims that are not merely artistic, but also promotional. This function of persona could be said to go back even as far as Vasari, who in his own writings about artists blurred fact with fiction, ultimately raising the profile of his workshop. Persona can also be projected upon artists by outside forces as a means to sell art or promote a particular agenda, be it nationalistic (as in the case of artists touted as national icons, such as Rembrandt or Van Gogh), or otherwise. Persona in such a sense is driven by contextually specific socio-economic forces, and reveals much about how perceptions of the artist function as a fundamental element of history.

With this issue Kunstlicht investigates the hidden tradition of personas in art history. The editorial board welcomes theoretical essays as well as (comparative) case studies. Authors may propose topics as diverse as (re)definitions of ‘persona', (re)contextualizations of existing biographies, parallels with other art forms and non-artistic cases, or discourse analyses.

Proposals (200 – 300 words) with attached résumés can be submitted until April 14, 2014. Selected authors will be invited to write a 2,000 – 3,000-word paper (excluding notes). Papers may be written either in English or in Dutch, although we insist that native Dutch speakers write in Dutch. Authors who publish in Kunstlicht will receive three complementary copies. Kunstlicht does not provide an author's honorarium. Two years following publication, papers will be submitted to the freely accessible online archive. This issue will appear in print, and additionally will feature a number of articles published online.

Contact:
Kunstlicht
Vrije Universiteit
VU University Amsterdam
Faculteit der Letteren
Faculty of Arts
De Boelelaan 1105
1081 HV Amsterdam

info@tijdschriftkunstlicht.nl

Reference:

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