

PUBLIC LECTURES
in the third seminar on
Periodization in the History of Art and its Conundrums.
How to tackle them in East-Central Europe
June 16 – 23, 2022



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Against the Canon. Contemporary Art in a World without a Center

on Thursday, June 16, at 5:00 PM

The history of modern art has been written from what has been happening in just a few cities in Europe and the United States. Even though contemporary art offers a more global perspective than the history of modern art, still artists outside of the traditional centers occasionally intervene in the great scenarios of art. They appear in biennials, in exhibitions, but they practically fail to establish themselves in international collections or to be inserted in the studies of artistic contemporaneity.

Instead of using the notions of ‘periphery’, ‘margins’, or ‘decentralization’ that has been activated to differentiate the art of the centers and of other geographies (peripheral modernity; decentralized conceptualism; margins of avant-garde), we propose the notion of “simultaneous avant-garde” to think about simultaneous cultural and artistic processes. This is a concept we will compare with that of “horizontal art history” proposed by Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski. If art history is built on the notions of originality and innovation, those of ‘periphery’ or ‘decentralization’ involve the notions of copying or imitation. Strategic copies, whose concepts are reversed, but which, however, start from the originals.

The history of art is a reduced history, guided by the idea of progress, which is a notion defined from the West. From such a perspective, the history of other, simultaneous proposed images, is obscured, sometimes invisible.

The selection process of art history is also a white and masculine one. It eliminates what is done outside the North American-Euro axis, eliminates the art of women, and eliminates the work done by Afro-descendants and indigenous people in Latin America – as well, we can add, the work made by Saami people in the region of Lapland, in Finland, Norway, Sweden and Russia.

Can we articulate different art stories than those that have given rise to a modern and contemporary art canon? What alternative concepts to those of style, evolution, progress, allow us to think about artistic culture? Is it possible to avoid notions such as originality and hierarchy, measured from central spaces, to think about the art world? What reading frames would be useful for thinking about art outside the ideas of productive centers and receptive spaces?

We consider that thinking the processes of images from new frames helps to discard the idea of central and peripheral spaces. Universalizing the artistic processes that occur in cities or central circuits generates the idea of outdated peripheries or dependent on the rhythms of the centers. This discussion also involves the ideology of the notion of “quality” in art. Can we interrogate notions that establish hierarchies and centers in the modern and contemporary art?



Cristian NAE, Associate Professor in the Department of Art History and Theory, Faculty of Visual Arts, George Enescu National University of Arts, Iași, Romania

Affective Time (Socialist Futures and Post-socialist Pasts)

on Friday, June 17, at 5:00 PM

Although 1989 became for many the threshold for the emergence of “contemporary art” as a global phenomenon, art history focused on Central and

Eastern Europe also used multiple markers of discontinuity such as 1945, 1956, 1968 and 1989, which shape mainly the social and political context of artistic production and reception. Thus, concepts such as “socialism” and “post-socialism” became keywords in periodizing art from Central and Eastern Europe.

Nevertheless, these umbrella concepts are not only describing a plurality of “constellational modernities”, relating to different heterogeneous temporalities and narratives across the bloc, but they are also affectively charged. On the one hand, affects shape the understanding of certain neo-avant-gardes from the perspective of the present. On the other hand, they were explored by contemporary artists that used images to store, expand and reflect on the notion of durational time after 1989.

In my presentation, I investigate what Dieter Roelstraete called “art as historiography”, which describes the way contemporary artists materialize, imagine and visualize the past through poetic means. By taking a closer look at time-based art projects from the region, I identify a series of key poetic strategies meant to destabilize the linear conception of time, such as critical nostalgia, alongside a fictional projection of a dystopian future. Thus, I argue that these artists propose what could be conceptualized as “affective time”, which might be taken into account when writing an “affective art history” as suggested by Luiza Nader. According to them, contemporaneity is being understood as a field of possibilities, as a co-existence of simultaneously divergent narratives of modernization, and as a multiplicity of different speeds and durations. If contemporary artist’s anachronic temporality is to be accepted by art historical writing, its affective undertones define the art object as an image in a state of perpetual becoming, and expose the entanglement between past and present as an effect of the artwork’s participation to multiple temporalities at once.



Mieke BAL, Professor of Theory of Literature and founding director of the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA), University of Amsterdam

Preposterous! Towards a Mutuality Between Thinking and Artmaking

on Monday, June 20, at 5:00 PM

This lecture is devoted to a practice that counters a dogmatic historicism as well as the hierarchical and linear implications of the currently popular idea of “artistic research”.

With “countering” I don’t mean rejecting. The nuanced difference between “counter-” and “anti-” lies therein, that countering recognizes and engages history critically, while opposing it and simply rejecting it would be a case of throwing away the baby with the bathwater. Instead, I will bring up and discuss a number of issues in which the temporality we deploy when making or visiting exhibitions becomes a crucial tool to change the experience. I will allege the example of my recent video *It’s About Time! Reflections on Urgency*, in which I deploy through the figure of Cassandra both the idea of “image-Thinking” and the mutuality between past and present I have called “pre-posterous” with a self-ironic wink.

Please watch before the talk the 30" film *It's About Time! Reflections on Urgency*.

This can be watched at <http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/films/its-about-time/>



Christopher WOOD, Professor and Chair, Department of German, New York University (Affiliated Faculty, Department of Comparative Literature and Institute of Fine Arts)

Does Realism Interfere with Periodization Schemas?

on Tuesday, June 21, at 5:00 PM

Scholars of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Western art have the most doubts about the significance of the historical period they study. Medievalists know that their object of study is remote; modernists know that their object of study is nearby. But how close to us is Renaissance and Baroque or so-called “early modern” art? This paper will suggest that there is a structural reason why Renaissance and Baroque art creates difficulties for periodization.

The reason is that Renaissance and Baroque art is essentially realist. Realism is a cultural project which modern philosophies of history have had trouble assimilating. This is because periodization schemas since the nineteenth century are all teleological, that is, they assess the past on the basis of its directedness towards the present. They ask: does an historical phenomenon point toward the world we know, or not?

I would argue that realism—the attempt to depict the way things are—is always a bad fit within philosophies of history which attempt to bestow meaning, especially redemptive meaning, on history. This is because realism as a project has its own internal, convergent momentum which transcends particular cultures, which cannot so easily be recruited to self-serving modernisms, and which finally has no meaning.



Edit ANDRÁS, Senior Research Member at the Institute of Art History, Centre for the Humanities of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, Hungary, and Visiting Professor at the History Department, CEU

Whose Memory is Commemorated in the Newly Erected Memorial of National Alliance in Budapest?

on Wednesday, June 22, at 5:00 PM

The memorial nearby the Hungarian parliament, inaugurated at the hundredth anniversary of the Trianon Peace Treaty stirred a heated debate mostly among historians. The main question was whether it is really about the national unity spanning beyond borders, as it is communicated by its name, or the historical Hungary is commemorated in it, as claimed by a cohort of acknowledged historians. Or is it rather a hidden Trianon monument, as some critics voiced? The debate centered around the meaning of the use of the Kingdom's geographic listing of 13,000 cities and towns that made up the Kingdom of Hungary in 1913, that were carved on both sides of the granite wall of the sloping memorial. Concerning the visual formation of the new memorial, even the critical voices were appreciative, asserting that at least this one is not a conservative, traditional and figurative monument cast in bronze or carved stone, but a “contemporary” one. The well-informed journalists referred to Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veteran Memorial* in Washington DC, as a prefiguration or model of the edifice (if not a blatant plagiarism).

The art historical interpretation starts where the historical ends and wishes to uncover what the visuality and spatiality of the monument communicates and what the role of the mythical elements that are incorporated is. In this regard, in comparison with Maya Lin's memorial the differences are much more telling than the similarities. The close reading of the edifice poses the question: what kind of hidden meaning is advocated by the architectural archetypes that are utilized in the construction, and what kind of sensory experience is the beholder exposed to and for what purpose? And finally, who is the mastermind behind this controversial memorial and who benefits from it?

The analysis wishes to demonstrate that one cannot underestimate the power of images when it comes to the nationalistic propaganda machine, despite it being materialized in a contemporary form and paired with an alternative official narrative.



Magdalena RADOMSKA, Assistant Professor, Art History Institute, Adam Mickiewicz University, Founder and Head of the Piotr Piotrowski Center for Research on East-Central European Art

On horizontal and not-so-horizontal cuts

On Thursday, June 23, at 5:00 PM

The lecture will discuss the notion of horizontal art history coined by Piotr Piotrowski as it is examined in the book *Horizontal Art History and Beyond. Revising Peripheral Critical Practices*, that is about to be published by Routledge, edited by Magdalena Radomska and Agata Jakubowska. The book is a critical examination of horizontal art history, which provokes a discussion on the original concept, possible methods to extend it, and its weakest points. It is a collection of essays written by international scholars (such as Edit András, Mathilde

Arnoux, Anthony Gardner, Terry Smith, Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, Jérôme Bazin or Andrea Giunta) who either critically practice horizontal art history, or propose theoretical revisions of the concept. The presentation aims at the critical reexamination of the concept and its aftermath, namely the idea of alterglobalist art history elaborated by Piotrowski in his last book, *A Global Approach to the Art of Eastern Europe* (trans. Anna Brzyski, with afterword by Magdalena Radomska), which is about to be published in English by Igor Zabel Association for Culture and Theory. It offers a clear concept of periodization of global art history in the form of horizontal cuts that crosscut the hierarchy of the center and peripheries.

The lecture will provide a Marxist approach both to the concept of horizontal/alterglobalist art history and its tools (horizontal cuts), asking about possible alternative adaptations of the notion of horizontality understood as a domain of global class solidarity that leads to the abolishment of class division interrelated with the division of labour, sustaining a seemingly elitist status of art that weakens its subversive potential. Such a framework authorizes the acknowledgment of the primacy of the base over superstructural analysis. It also criticizes horizontal art history for its neglect of the notion of class, which undermines its horizontal status and thus the horizontal character of the periodization proposed by Piotrowski in his last book.

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