



Questioning the great divide(s) during the Cold War: a tool box for a transnational history of art



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Abstracts

Mathilde Arnoux - Shared Reality: Towards a history of artistic relations between the East and the West during the Cold War

Endeavouring to examine the artistic relations between Eastern and Western Europe during the Cold War is a challenge. Given the imposed restrictions on movement and the permeation of competing ideologies into the sphere of art during this period, such a task might seem unrealistic. Yet taking a closer look at these limits prompts us to question them. Researching artistic relations in Europe during the Cold War calls for a reflection on the ways in which we identify these relations and what they entailed. Basing our work on research that highlights the importance of the notions of "reality" and "the real" in art discourse and artistic practices during this period, we studied the benefits of adopting a cross-perspective view in relation to a particular notion within a transnational research project. Using actual examples of artistic relations that existed between France, the FRG, the GDR and Poland, we looked at specific interpretations of the notions of "reality" and "the real" within the different contexts, while aiming to shed light on shared viewpoints, misconceptions and misunderstandings. This approach enabled us to establish distinctions and draw connections, which raised questions about the political and ideological divisions that have marked analyses of this period of history, and provided an opportunity to gain a renewed perspective on artistic relations in Europe during the Cold War.

Juliane Debeusscher - Questioning interpretative frames: Central European art's trajectories and points of fixation, between 1971-1981 and beyond

My PhD research examines the conditions of circulation and visibility of art from socialist Central Europe across the Iron Curtain, between 1971 and 1981. Cold War cultural practices are examined from the perspective of their implication in a set of transnational networks and exhibitions, which contributed to shape specific ways to interact and produce discourses about and around specific artifacts and their authors. If, on one hand, studying the trajectories of Central European art across Europe and the specific forms of communication produced in this particular context allows to contradict the binary readings that rely on the idea of two separated blocs (East/West, capitalist/communist, etc.) and to shed new light on the dynamics of Cold War transnational exchange, on the other hand, the appearance of this art and its authors in the framework of international exhibitions like the Paris or the Venice Biennial raises the question of its reception and interpretation, leading to the construction of

specific knowledge and discourses that could, in fact, be influenced by Cold War culture and politics. My presentation in the seminar will focus on the question of the interpretative frames applied to these practices, and proposes to reflect on their application over the decade under consideration (1971-1981) and also nowadays, in historiographic and curatorial practices. Such back and forth movement and the way it influences the research and writing process is, in fact, of particular interest to me. One of these interpretative frames relies on the idea of “dissidence”, examined here as a constructed category which fuelled different imaginaries in the East and the West.

Anita Orzes - From Venice Biennial to Havana, going through....? / De Venecia a La Habana, ¿pasando por...?

Is there a single history of the Biennials or have there always been talks about the history of some Biennials? The historiography of the Biennials is a recent discipline that aims at identifying the specificity of this artistic phenomenon: its geographical and historical position, its *raison d'être*, its function within the political and economic context or its curatorial practices.

In this complex scenario, if the Venice Biennial is the mother of all Biennials, Havana Biennial is the progeny of the Biennales of the peripheries and launched a new way of making art in a biennial. There is no doubt that this pioneering action has pushed the foundation of the peripheries (Johannesburg, Istanbul or Dakar) and its consequent proliferation, but, on the other hand, no researches have investigated the relationship between the Havana Biennial and the biennials in Latin America. In fact, only some of them follow the original objectives of Havana. To understand why, we must answer the following questions: what has the impact of the Havana Biennial on the Latin American reality been? In what way and for whom has it marked a turn? Is it the only responsible for this new way of making art in a Biennial or have the years between 1951 and 1984 set the conditions for creating a new format for Latin America? In the case of Havana, have the historical moment and the political situation set the basis for its success?

Pablo Santa Olalla - What is the South-Atlantic Space of Conceptualism?

How to map the relational networks established between the conceptualist art milieus from Spain and some Latin American countries? Beyond issues related to the disciplinary specificities of Art History and the study of networks, a research on transatlantic contacts has to deal with specific spatial problems. The comparison of these two territories is polluted with strong doses of cultural colonialism, linear readings of influence and derivation and hierarchizations such as the center/periphery distinction. At the same time, and taking into account the recent attention given to Latin American conceptualist practices, if both territories —Spain and Latin America— may be read as subaltern geographies, could it mean that a South-South dialogue can be opened? Departing from the Spatial Theory developed by Edward W. Soja (*Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, 1989; *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, 1996), the South-Atlantic Space of Conceptualism tries to position the researcher's standpoint into an abstract location, neither in Spain nor in Latin America. Does this theoretical construct allow to start a horizontal writing of Art History? Is it possible to open such a detached place of enunciation from the University of Barcelona?

Abdiel Segarra Rios - Puerto Rican abstraction in front of "National" Art History and its narratives

Puerto Rico's hegemonic art historical narrative privileges printmaking and figurative styles over other contemporary and modern ways of producing art objects. During the 50's and most of the 60's and 70's, the production of abstraction was treated as a foreign style closely related to American Abstract Expressionism and by consequence reduced to a derivative expression. Abstract art was seen as driven (mostly) by trends in the American art market and framed as an aesthetic betrayal to the "national need" of developing an autonomous identity. We propose using Puerto Rican abstraction as a case study, to dismantle hegemonic nationalist narrative, and to gather, rescue and organize the historical evidence of abstract painting in the Island. Also, arrange it as a parallel history to contrast with the arguments that confined that kind of production to an irrelevant category that did not contribute to the development of the Puerto Rican experience (and consciousness) as a colonized territory of the United States. A central part of the research and its methodology is its focus on interviews with the living artists, that struggled into producing a type of art that wasn't recognized by many Puerto Rican historians as an authentic expression from the Island. Also, we have been working on putting together a collection of books, catalogs, invitations, articles from newspapers and magazines to draw a historical context to help us compare it with the "official" discourses about Puerto Rican modern art. We have also gathered a list of public and private art collections in the Island and New York City, to study the long-term effects of the nationalist prejudice against abstraction and the impact in the construction itself of the Puerto Rican art memory, image and identity inside and outside of the Island. In the future, we hope to propose as part of the research, a comparative study of the institutional, programmatic offer, to measure the exposure of abstraction and its inclusion into the official museographical visual narrative of Puerto Rican art.

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