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Call for paper

Arts & Création

Projet REL-ARTS

The 'critical relation' in France: visual arts as seen through the writings

“Defining abstract art, Paris - New York - Tokyo, 1944-1964”

The symposium is the culmination of a project that began in 2016 on painting in the post-war era (1944-1964). See <https://relarts.hypotheses.org/>

Sometimes regarded as an in-between period and no doubt underestimated by academia, it began in November 1944, the year when the Salon d'Automne was renamed the Salon de la Libération and dedicated to Picasso. It is said to have symbolically come to an end in June 1964, the date of the 32nd Venice Biennale, when the American Robert Rauschenberg received the Grand Prix. Painting is considered in the context of a “critical relationship”, to use the words of Jean Starobinski, that is, in terms of its combined reception among writers and critics, and the art community and the general public. The Art Criticism Archives of the Rennes National Institute of Art History (Archives de la critique d'art, INHA de Rennes), provided a valuable body of documentation for the seminar work.

The aim of this symposium is to question how the art community regarded abstraction during this period. In galleries as in discourse, abstract painting plays a leading role in aesthetic power relations that play out internationally and which are inseparable from economic and political issues. The presence of abstraction changes artists' positions, whether they class their work to be abstract or not, and generates debate both among writers and critics.

We feel it is necessary to explore abstract art in the post-war period when it became a “worldwide phenomenon”, spelling the start of global flows in the art world for stakeholders across the board. Our aim is not to give it a single definition, but rather to gain a better understanding of the complexity of denominations in the field of painting (art informel, “art autre” (art of another kind), concrete art, and Réalités nouvelles (new realities), etc.), to analyse the gaps between the discourse on “abstract art” and that of earlier periods, and to try and define their characteristics in context. We will consider the theoretical viewpoints and



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the often contradictory stories developed in intellectual frameworks that may be derived from the thinking of the avant-garde movement or from new academicisms in particular.

At a time when discussion about abstraction as a promise or an impasse has virtually dried up, when talk is more often of false debate, and when more general and contradictory definitions are becoming widespread, we hope to shed some light on the matter of abstraction, by moving beyond the far too simple abstraction-figuration antithesis.

Research must fit into an international perspective. It can also build on critical works from writers or “specialists”, be based on case studies (for example, an analysis of the work and impact of a Paris gallery with international connections), or focus on an unexpected artistic direction. The aesthetic angle may also be developed more widely. In any event, it will foster different perspectives around the chosen subject. The importance of reflection is that it is interdisciplinary. Researchers in literature(s) who are interested in art criticism in all its forms (from articles for journals to poetic writings, for example) will be able to exchange with art historians, philosophers or sociologists.

See www.mshb.fr/actualites_mshb/-aac-br-l-art-abstrait-en-quete-de-definitions/5600/

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Proposals (title and summary of 5 to 10 lines) are to be sent to Françoise NICOL (francoise.nicol@univ-nantes.fr) before October 22, 2018.