

REASSESSING MODERNISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Towards a multifaceted understanding

International Conference at ARoS Aarhus Art Museum 24-25 April 2014

This two-day international conference aims at reassessing the concept of modernism. With a privileged distance to both modernism and its conceptual twin post-modernism the conference intends to open a critical investigation of the possible meanings of modernism in the 21st century. It will question modernisms past, present and future. It hopes to facilitate a multifaceted understanding and aims to represent the concept of modernism from different disciplinary backgrounds and perspectives. The invited keynotes and speakers will represent a heterogeneity of views that throw light on and add new knowledge to not only modernism and modernity, but also postmodernism.

The conference hopes to inspire new research on modernism, transgressing the limits defined by research on singular artists or art works. It hopes to draw attention to new perspectives, relations and contexts in which modernist art works can be understood.

Being held at the Museum ARoS, which houses one of the finest collections of Danish modernist painting, the conference has a natural focus on subjects related to modernism and the visual arts, but welcomes reflections on and exploration of all aspects of modernism. The conference thus opens the field of modernism in an international perspective inviting reflection on: the relation between modernism and art history/art criticism, modernism and aesthetics, modernism and history, modernism and society, modernism and popular culture, modernism and politics, modernism and feminism, modernism and postmodernism, modernism and avant-garde. When and what was modernism, what is it now, and what will it be in the future?

Registration

Participation fee is DKK 100 (entrance to the museum and lunch + coffee included)

Registration deadline April 21th via aros.safeticket.dk For further information please contact lp@aros.dk

The conference is planned in cooperation between ARoS, Museum of Modern Art Aarhus and Aarhus University and is generously funded by the Danish Agency for Culture.



NYE PERSPEKTIVER PÅ MODERNISME

Mod en udvidet forståelse i det 21. århundrede

International konference på ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum 24.-25. april 2014

Målet med denne konference er at gentænke modernismebegrebet og dets mulige betydninger i det 21. århundrede. Med konferencen ønsker vi at bane vej for en bredere forståelse af modernisme og udfolder derfor begrebet fra flere nye positioner og perspektiver. De inviterede keynotes og talere fra forskellige fagområder vil præsentere ny viden, ikke kun om modernisme og modernitet, men også om postmodernisme.

Konferencen håber at inspirere fremtidig forskning i modernisme. Den ønsker at sætte fokus på nye perspektiver, relationer og kontekster, gennem hvilke modernistisk kunst kan belyses.

Konferencen afholdes på ARoS – hvor en af Danmarks fineste samlinger af modernistisk maleri har til huse – og har derfor et naturligt fokus på emner relateret til modernisme og billedkunst. Den indbyder desuden til diskussion og udforskning af modernismens øvrige facetter og åbner således modernismebegrebet i et internationalt perspektiv, som inviterer til kritisk refleksion over: relationen mellem modernisme og kunsthistorie/kunstkritik, modernisme og æstetik, modernisme og historie, modernisme og samfund, modernisme og populærkultur, modernisme og politik, modernisme og feminisme, modernisme og postmodernisme, modernisme og avantgardisme. Hvornår og hvad var modernisme, hvordan kan man forstå den i dag – og i fremtiden?

Registrering

Deltagergebyr 100 kr. (inkluderer entré til museet samt frokost/kaffe begge dage) betales via aros.safeticket.dk senest 21. april . For yderligere information kontakt lp@aros.dk

Konferencen er tilrettelagt i et samarbejde mellem ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum og Aarhus Universitet og er finansieret med generøs støtte fra Kulturstyrelsen.



PROGRAM:

Thursday, April 24th

- 10-11 **Registration**
- 11.-11.15 **Welcome**
- 11.15-12.30 **Keynote: Thierry de Duve, *Modernist Painting***
- 12.30-13.30 **Lunch**
- 13.30-14.50 **Lennart Gottlieb, *Modernism Reassessed. What are we Talking about?***
- Inge Lise Mogensen Bech, *Reinvestigating Modernism from a Danish Point of View***
- 14.50-15.20 **Coffee**
- 15.20-16.40 **Richard Murphy, *Modernism, Postmodernism and the Avant-Garde***
- Robin Schuldenfrei, *Modernism, Materiality, and the Embedded Object***
- 16.55-18:00 **Keynote: Morten Kyndrup, *Art, Aesthetics, Modernism: Modernism after *la condition postmoderne****

Friday, April 25th

- 9.30-10.45 **Keynote: Jonathan Harris: *Bijasuo: Untruths about Modernism and its Globalized Futures***
- 10.45-11.00 **Coffee**
- 11.15-12.35 **Michael Kjær, *Modernism as Concrete Visibility***
- Jacob Wamberg, *The Screen and the Unhuman: Toward a Macrohistorical Topology of Modernism***
- 12.35-13.30 **Lunch**
- 13.30-14.50 **Rasmus Kjærboe, *How to Promote Modernism Successfully***
- Dorthe Aagesen, *The Museum as Agent in the Construction of "Modernism"***
- 14.50-15.15 **Coffee**
- 15.15 – 16.30: **Keynote: W.J.T. Mitchell, *Modernism, Madness and Media***
- 16.30 **Closing remarks and farewell**

ABSTRACTS:

Thierry de Duve

Professor emeritus from the Université de Lille 3, historian and philosopher of art, Los Angeles

Modernist Painting

Modernism was born in Paris around the middle of the nineteenth century. Why there, why then? What was modernism an answer to? I shall argue that the French Beaux-Arts system— with its unique conflict between the State’s control over the careers of artists and the free access to the Salon by the public—has everything to do with the content of modernist painting and the form it took in the work of Courbet and Manet.

Senior Researcher, dr. phil. Lennart Gottlieb

Independent scholar, Copenhagen

Modernism Reassessed. What are we Talking about?

Modernism is a concept by which we can measure our pain and agonies as art historians and theorists when dealing with art in general terms. It's strange that a concept so vague and complex is still accepted and as scientifically valid and useful. It's about time that we try to establish a firmer ground for speculation and historical interpretations of modernism. I propose a historically determined approach to the use of the concept of modernism in its *modal* meaning and the pure rejection of the use of the concept in its *epochal* meaning. Works with historically defined modernist traits exist, Modernism never did. Dealing with modal modernism I make a distinction between a *temporally* oriented understanding of modernism (modernist traits) perceived as an expression of a special relation to modernity, and a *qualitative* understanding where modernism is seen as an expression of a special relationship to the means of art. I also propose to stand firm against the growing tendency towards an annihilation of the conceptual difference between modernism and avant-gardism.

Inge Lise Mogensen Bech

PhD Fellow at Aarhus University and ARoS

Reinvestigating Modernism from a Danish point of view

Were the modernist artists mad? “Yes” answered the Danish doctor and bacteriologist Carl Julius Salomonsen in 1919 without hesitation. In his conspicuously polemic book “The newest tendencies in art and mental illnesses” he argued that the modern artist had a mentally disturbed preference for the ugly, a disease for which he coined the term “Dysmorphism”. Salomonsen’s coupling of art and madness led to a heated discussion (later known as the Dysmorphism debate), where artists and others would counter his arguments. Even today the reception of the debate focuses primarily on the pairing of art and insanity. What from one perspective might look as a monument of ill chosen perspectives on modern art might however from another perspective reveal itself as a valuable alternative source for understanding modernism. In this presentation I will take Salomonsen’s descriptions of modern art as a point of departure. Reconsidering the material on which Salomonsen built his argument I shall argue for an understanding of modernism that does not preclude an alternative or even controversial re-contextualisation of modern art.

Professor Richard Murphy

Visiting Professor of German Comparative Literature and Film, University of Sussex

Modernism, Postmodernism and the Avant-Garde

Abstract to come

Dr Robin Schuldenfrei

Lecturer in 20th Century Modernism, The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London

Modernism, Materiality, and the Embedded Object

Over the course of the long modern period art historians and critics have theorized their ages' objects in a manner that has often been ground-breaking for later art and architectural history. This paper will examine theorizations of the modern object, asking what the implications might be of the present's renewed focus on the object—whether monument, architectural object, art object, or everyday object—for new thinking on modernism; and, in turn, how modernism's foundational myths and recurring concerns might shape present understandings of art and architectural objects in ways that allow for new modes of consideration.

The impact of heterogeneous research methodologies will be explored, namely how insights from cultural history, social history, and political and economic history, as well as concerns arising from notions of materiality, consumer culture, social relationships, and display, lead us to an understanding of modernism's objects as discursive, as both profoundly embedded and embodying. This paper looks at the ways in which objects, deeply and solidly lodged in their time and place, give insight into a specific culture and its concerns, and simultaneously give issue to discursive and theoretical frameworks that inform conditions of modernity more generally.

Professor, dr. phil. Morten Kyndrup

Aarhus University, Executive Director at AIAS, Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies

Art, Aesthetics, Modernism

Modernism after *la condition postmoderne*

"Art" and "Aesthetics" in the modern sense(s) were born as parts of the same general distinction process during the 18th century. *Poiesis* and *aesthesis* were

separated. These distinctions obviously became the condition of possibility for Romanticism's subsequent efforts to re-unify art and aesthetics in the name of truth, thus making possible "the aesthetic regime of art", which has more or less been in power ever since. The delicate interrelationship, this "marriage", between art and the aesthetic has, however, been subject to an ongoing re-negotiation, recently not least critically exposed concerning the questions of "truth", of "authenticity" and of "objecthood". What was the role of Modernism in this negotiation process? What is currently in the process of becoming Modernism's historical impact on the relation between Art and the Aesthetic – Modernism's radical critique and re-phrasing of the character, the form and the function of the Artwork taken into consideration? Did Modernism's revolutionary endeavours actually work confirmingly within or subversively against the framing conditions of the aesthetic regime of art? Or somehow both?

Professor Jonathan Harris

Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton.

Bijiasuo: Untruths about Modernism and its Globalized Futures

Bijiasuo is the Ping Ying translation of 'Picasso' - Ping Ying is the official phonetic system for transcribing the sound of Chinese characters into Latin script. Where better to start in any re-assessment of Modernism's fate than with a radicalisation of some of the themes in T.J. Clark's recent book on Picasso's achievements? Such a re-assessment is inevitably personal and historical, autobiographical and formalist, political and apolitical. Clark's oeuvre, from his books on Courbet to the study of Picasso, are a social history in themselves and indicate the inseparability of the personal and the historical, the autobiographical and the formalist, the political and the apolitical. The discussion I propose will locate historic Modernism – and its forms of social-historical study so perfected by Clark – in the globalized moment of 2014 when its senses and attachments lie permanently dislocated from the intellectual order and security of mid- and late-twentieth century western intellectual life and lives.

Professor, dr. phil. Jacob Wamberg

Institute of Aesthetics and Communication, Aarhus University

The Screen and the Unhuman: Toward a Macrohistorical Topology of Modernism

This paper will examine modernist abstraction's indeterminacy of referential content, its suspension of perception, as a strengthening and confluence of two tendencies: (1) an emphasis of the pictorial surface as a more or less opaque screen; and (2) a depiction of unhuman worlds outside, or inside, the human body. The first tendency, the main ingredient of Clement Greenberg's modernist genealogy, I will see as a reactualization of medieval pictorial modes, thereby positing Deleuze's notion of smooth and haptic space in a stricter historiographic cartography. The second tendency, reflected in Robert Rosenblum's genealogy of abstraction, I will see as a general exploration of the sublime, evading the human body for non-organic chaotic or geometric surroundings, possibly bordering on abject sub-organic worlds.

Michael Kjær

PhD Fellow, University of Copenhagen and Vejle Kunstmuseum

Modernism as Concrete Visibility

If images are today becoming *technical*, images of concepts, as Vilém Flusser would have it, how can we then understand this technicality of images? To try to answer this question I will explicate two image theories: First Gottfried Boehm's theory of *iconic difference* and second Michel Foucault's conception of modern images as being concrete *image-objects*. Two very different phenomenologies of the image. To me the differences between Boehm's and Foucault's approaches are in itself revealing this new technical status of the image. A status that is already dealt with in early modern images. But can the becoming technical of images be contained within the established discourse of modernism? I will be addressing exchanges of concepts between painting and photography in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Rasmus Kjærboe

PhD Fellow at Aarhus University and Ordrupgaard

How to Promote Modernism Successfully

Two Private Museums and the Experience of Art, Architecture and Nature

When did modernism arrive in Denmark? This presentation examines two important instances of modernism in the visual arts being promoted by private museums, and it argues for an institutional and discursive analysis of the 'when' and 'how': Ordrupgaard (1918) and Louisiana (1958) were founded by private initiatives 40 years apart, and where one almost failed the other triumphed. But both are prime examples of important 'modernist interventions' into the popular reception of art. In order for something to become true and palpable it demands to be quoted, iterated and performed, and a crucial way most versions of modernism achieved success came through repeated exhibitionary framing. To this end, Louisiana itself became the site for the development of a particularly significant integration of art, architecture and nature. This experientially seductive strategy has since been continually refined to the extent that it is now the museum as ensemble, rather than the specific art, which has become the international icon. Significantly, Copenhagen had actually already had a museum of international modernism many years previously in which nature and architecture played a defining role. From the close of WWI until 1922, Ordrupgaard presented the Danish public with modern French painting up to Cézanne, Gauguin and Matisse. Comparing institutions, the ideological underpinnings of both comes into focus, and a certain framing of modernism in the visual arts can be seen as the value laden rhetorical promotion of specific politics and values.

Mag.art. Dorthe Aagesen

Curator, Senior Researcher, National Gallery of Denmark

The Museum as agent in the construction of "Modernism"

Inasmuch as the museum is committed to outlining art historical genealogies, and presenting its audiences with stylistic or conceptual categories, an active engagement with concepts such as "Modernism" is inevitably implied. But how

can the museum contribute to a critical reassessment? While a Formalist concept of Modernism has long determined the presentation of Modernist art in most museums (and still does), alternative exhibition strategies may be used to address and question current concepts and introduce different interpretative models. Taking as its point of departure concrete examples of the practice at the Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen, this paper will discuss how museums can function as active agents and contribute to the rethinking of Modernism in the 21st Century.

Professor W.J.T. Mitchell

The University of Chicago

Modernism, Madness and Media

Abstract to come