For a Fragmentary Rereading of the 1960s Turn in Europe

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/27200>

DOI: 10.4000/critiquedart.27200

ISBN: 2265-9404

ISSN: 2265-9404

Publisher

Groupeement d'intérêt scientifique (GIS) Archives de la critique d'art

Printed version

Date of publication: 21 November 2017

Number of pages: 125-129

ISBN: 1246-8258

ISSN: 1246-8258

Electronic reference

Camille Paulhan, « *For a Fragmentary Rereading of the 1960s Turn in Europe* », *Critique d'art* [Online], 49 | Automne/hiver 2017, Online since 21 November 2018, connection on 30 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/27200> ; DOI : 10.4000/critiquedart.27200

This text was automatically generated on 30 April 2019.

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REFERENCES

Breathless Days, 1959-1960, Durham : Duke University Press, 2017. Sous la dir. de Serge Guibaut, John O'Brian

Pontus Hultén and Moderna Museet: The Formative Years, Stockholm : Moderna Museet ; Londres : Koenig Books, 2017

Déborah Laks, *Des déchets pour mémoire : l'utilisation de matériaux de récupération par les nouveaux réalistes (1955-1975)*, Paris : Les Presses du réel, 2017

EDITOR'S NOTE

Every new history book contributes to rewriting previous narratives from the viewpoint of the present. Up until now we have chosen to address these updates through two-way dialogical comparisons: the new narrative versus its predecessors. But the present transforms objects and paradigms, in distinct ways, depending on the available distance. What we offer here is a sort of exquisite corpse of the present's effect on the past, through reducing the distance between each decade: from 1959-1960 to the 00s, from long distance observation to present uses of these different pasts, in six stages or six cadaver slices, consisting of 1 to 3 books each.

- 1 Three recent publications offer a rereading of the turn of Western art in the 1960s: the first is a collection of academic texts (introduced by Serge Guibaut and John O'Brian) about the pivotal years 1959 and 1960, the second is a dense essay by Déborah Laks, derived from her doctoral thesis on Nouveau réalisme, the third is a collective work devoted to Pontus Hultén and published by the Moderna Museet. All three offer a retort,

through original yet uneven angles, to the negative outlook that maintains that everything has already been said or written on this period. For instance, concerning the study of artists whose work is closely linked to the emergence of the post-industrial consumer society (Marcel Duchamp, Daniel Spoerri, Jean Tinguely...), trauma studies have replaced certain authors whose voices had become too dominant. The ideas that Jill Carrick develops in her article on Nouveau réalisme (*Breathless Days*, p. 129-151), similarly to Déborah Laks's theory, contradict the trend which, following Pierre Restany, positions Nouveau réalisme as the European counterpart of American Pop art. Instead, both these authors insist on the long-silenced trauma of World War II, as well as on the artists' desire to go against a certain kind of modernism. In *Des Déchets pour mémoire*, Déborah Laks displays a stimulating intellectual curiosity, when she evokes the symbolic anthropophagy of waste at play in Nouveau réalisme, or certain artists' interest in mastication and digestion. Her argumentation rests on a very tight analysis which draws on numerous authors (Michel Foucault, Mary Douglas...) in order to develop a theory of waste as the unthinkable of 1960s European society, following the wartime period when recycling was positively valued. Her traumatic interpretation is never univocal, on the contrary opening promising interpretative perspectives, especially in the direction of feminist studies, or by going beyond the framework of an art movement whose members were defined by a slightly dictatorial Pierre Restany, who disregarded the bonds of friendship, aesthetics or politics that connected his contemporaries. Other authors are less cautious in their hypotheses: Hadrien Laroche's essay in *Breathless Days* (p. 31-59), in which he tries to establish an analogy between the industrial copies of Duchamp's readymades at the beginning of the 1960s and the industrial nature of the Holocaust, in contrast to the first readymades that, according to him, are closer to the disfigured veterans of World War I (the *gueules cassées*) seems particularly questionable. Though several articles from *Breathless Days*, which focus on little-known works and series, like the article by Carla Benzan on Piero Manzoni's *Ominidi* (p. 275-312) are perfectly interesting, the history of that period's institutions also proves an invigorating angle. In his article (p. 60-81), Richard Leeman addresses the creation of the Paris Biennale at the end of the 1950s. His richly documented yet sarcastic paper subtly explores the French institutional complex in relation to these artists. The Moderna Museet book is less irreverent, examining Pontus Hultén's activity within the museum, and offering, in the form of art history revisited by museum studies, several good quality pieces on Hultén's exhibitions. It also discusses (in Ylva Hillström's article, p. 149-172) a significant aspect of the Moderna Museet's outreach policy: its learning activities, which were driven by curator Carlo Derkert. Of note is a unpublished essay by Hultén, in the form of a manifesto: "How Does One Wish a Museum for Modern Art to Function?" (1962), which is one of the focal points of the book. The author expounds his opinion of museums, which should stay away from the pressure exerted by the market and visitors, and even be suspicious of good taste. This short document, which was originally written as a letter to an art collector, is a breath of fresh air: it illustrates Hultén's vision of the museum, a place to discover the works in a permanent collection or to be confronted with the most original contemporary pieces, and where artists are granted individual freedom.

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Camille Paulhan holds a PhD in Art History from Paris I-Panthéon Sorbonne University. She defended her thesis, which was devoted to the perishable in 1960s-1970s art and supervised by Philippe Dagen in 2014. She is a teacher at the Ecole supérieure d'art du pays basque. Her latest publications include « Moisissures et décompositions » in the catalogue for *Peter Hutchinson* (Fage ; FRAC Bretagne, 2015) and « L'œuvre d'art à l'ère de son irréproductibilité technique » in *Facettes* (#1, Autumn 2015), « Remarques morcellaires sur le champignon » in *Talweg* (#4, January 2017).