Turning Back Time: the Living Contemporaneity of Avant-gardes

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REFERENCES

A Different Way to Move: minimalismes, New York, 1960-1980, Berlin : Hatje Cantz ; Nîmes : Carré d'art, 2017

The Revolution Is Dead: Long Live the Revolution!: From Malevitch to Judd, From Deineka to Bartana, Berne : Kunstmuseum : Zentrum Paul Klee ; Munich : Prestel, 2017. Sous la dir. de Michael Baumgartner, Kathleen Bühler, Nina Zimmer

- 1 Although anniversaries are often reduced to occasions for canonisation, which can have a somewhat dampening effect on the events they celebrate, this is not the case for two exhibitions, *The Revolution Is Dead: Long Live the Revolution!* and *A Different Way to Move: minimalismes*, New York, 1960-1980, which are respectively being held in Bern for the centenary of the Revolution of 1917¹ and at the Carré d'art in Nîmes for the 40th anniversary of the Centre Pompidou. They both share the same ambition: to offer new perspectives on two memorable moments of the 20th century, in order to write history from the viewpoint of the present, taking advantage of the new prospects offered by historical depth of field, shedding new light, developing a new focus. In so doing, they confirm that art history is also shaped by exhibitions, which contribute to its rereading through their curatorial choices. By modifying their focal point, the different analyses and their perspectives such as they are developed in these catalogues try and map out links and connections that were hidden or minimised by art history.
- 2 Marcella Lista, the curator of *A Different Way to Move*, introduces an alternative history of Minimal art, by exhibiting the role of choreographic experimentations, especially those of the Judson Dance Theater, that have often been overlooked by the historiography of Minimal art, often restricted to visual arts. The book examines, beyond the collaborations

between dancers, musicians and sculptors, which in themselves wholly justify the promised interdisciplinary approach, how the processes used by the main figures of the New York scene were an argument in favour of decompartmentalising artistic fields and questioning existing categories in the history of this period.

- 3 Minimalism is also evoked in *The Revolution Is Dead: Long Live the Revolution!* as is suggested by the subhead of the exhibition section devoted to the abstract branch of revolutionary art: “From Malevich To Judd”, which explores the influence of Russian avant-gardes on New York Minimal art in the 1960s. Although Donald Judd regretted they were discovered so late, they did interest several major figures in the movement, such as Dan Flavin and Frank Stella. They also inspired the works of some European artists such as Blinky Palermo and Imi Knoebel in Germany and the “BMPT” collective in France.
- 4 The reinterpretation offered by *The Revolution Is Dead: Long Live the Revolution!* is part of an international art history. Every contribution in the rich catalogue offers a new perspective on the repercussions and ramifications of revolutionary art, observable over the course of the century in a geographic zone that goes from Europe and the United States to Latin America. The curators, Michael Baumgartner, Kathleen Bühler and Nina Zimmer, consider that the 100-year historical distance helps evaluate the event’s impact on art and its history, offering a new perspective, organised in two distinct branches which run parallel but separate, with on the one hand, the legacy of the Russian avant-gardes and on the other, the tradition of Socialist realism. Far from marking the end of art, the search for the zero of form initiated by Kasimir Malevich was pursued all along the 20th century in different forms, whose new meanings are analysed by the different contributions in the catalogue. The other part of the catalogue is devoted to the legacy of realist art, in league with the official party. Alexandre Deineka, with his propaganda posters and his monumental paintings of the Soviet people is one of the pioneers of this movement. The exhibition shows how, over the course of the century, realist art influenced different fields — painting, video, photography — and how many artistic productions tried to alter its codes and subvert the representations at work in this type of official art.
- 5 Chronological distance, rather than an obstacle, turns out to be a productive possibility in the reinterpretation of 20th-century art history it allows. Through the reframing they perform, these books offer a new take on the contagious power of 20th-century avant-gardes, shaping a new stage in their historicisation, through the interpolations between past and present. This new stage no longer implies identifying precursors which fall in line with a linear vision of history, but traces pluralist and ramified approaches that go back and forth between past and present. In other words, it sets Art history in motion.

NOTES

1. Organised in two parts at the Kunstmuseum and at the Paul Klee Zentrum.

AUTHORS

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Laurence Corbel is an Aesthetics lecturer at Rennes 2 University. Her publications particularly include *Le Discours de l'art : écrits d'artistes (1960-1980)* released by the Presses Universitaires de Rennes (2012). Her research originally focused on 20th and 21st-century writings by artists in all their instances (theory, criticism and fiction). It now extends to the oral forms of artists' discourses (conferences, performances and interviews) and the transfers and interactions between different artistic disciplines (dance, literature, visual arts) and the fields of philosophy, humanities, and social sciences.