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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/37442>

DOI: 10.4000/critiquedart.37442

ISSN: 2265-9404

Publisher

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

Electronic reference

Maria Bremer, « Harald Szeemann: Museum of Obsessions (sous la dir. de Glenn Phillips, Philipp Kaiser) + Harald Szeemann: Selected Writings », *Critique d'art* [Online], All the reviews on line, Online since 27 November 2019, connection on 23 September 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/37442> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/critiquedart.37442>

This text was automatically generated on 23 September 2020.

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- 1 Since the acquisition of Harald Szeemann's extensive archive, the Getty Research Institute has fostered academic and curatorial research on the Swiss curator (1933–2005). From the seven-year-long engagement with his holdings stem a touring exhibition, complemented by a meticulous reconstruction of Szeemann's 1974 show "Grandfather: A pioneer like us", as well as two newly published volumes: an exhibition catalog, edited by Glenn Phillips and Philipp Kaiser with Doris Chon and Pietro Rigolo, and an English translation and re-edition of selected writings, supervised by Chon, Phillips and Rigolo. These novel outcomes aim to re-interrogate Szeemann's relevance for both fields of contemporary art and exhibition history. In exhibiting a figure which has come to stand for the very invention of the curator as an independent exhibition-maker; in studying, translating and publishing his archival holdings, it is the relationship between the curator's biography, his exhibition practice and writings that takes center stage. Taken together, these operations challenge us to reflect on the reasons driving his current reconsideration. To the historian's eye, what Szeemann's vast holdings capture—beyond the contingencies of his life—are crucial changes in the art field, during decades of expansion and professionalization. Even as it connects him to these structural transitions (strengthening his image as the pioneer of independent curatorship, a profession which emerged in the 1970s along with the rise of the temporary exhibition format), the catalog insists on the idiosyncrasies of Szeemann's position. Under the title "Museum of Obsessions", the publication gathers eight original essays along with an impressive apparatus of plates and a series of interview excerpts. Highlighted is a specific timespan in the curator's career, one that follows his tenure at the Kunsthalle Bern, and the artistic direction of documenta 5. After supporting the process-based and post-minimal tendencies of the 1960s, in the 1970s and 1980s

Szeemann developed a series of research-based essay-exhibitions at the relative margins of the art field, that included subjects ranging from family to cultural history, and the historical avant-gardes. While freelancing for his fictional “Agency for spiritual guest labor”, he looked at the present through an increasingly anachronic lens. Focusing on these years of emotional engagement and exhaustion across and beyond institutional infrastructures, the catalog grounds Szeemann’s specificity in the cosmos of “intensive” artworks, attitudes, exhibitions, and themes which grew around his persona, ideally enclosed in the conceptual place of a “Museum of Obsessions”. Mainly, the essays revolve around his impossible museum (Chon), the exhibitions “Grandfather – A pioneer like us” (Mariana Roquette Teixeira, Phillips), “The bachelor machines” (Rigolo), “Monte Verità: The breasts of truth” (Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev), as well as “Tendency towards the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: European utopias since 1800” (Megan R. Luke). While scholars Chon, Teixeira, Rigolo and Luke proceed with philological rigor, at once providing fresh insights into the curatorial strategies and histories of ideas and gender entangled with the exhibitions’ themes, curators Christov-Bakargiev and Phillips play the game of professional self-reflection, respectively reactivating Szeemann’s profile as both visionary documenta leader and outsider, and the genealogy of male pioneers he created with his personal manifesto, the “Grandfather”-exhibition. Thereby, the registers of philology and homage are entwined in the volume, while the conversation around the Szeemann-myth-whose facets have long been reflected upon in discourses of critical curating and curatorial studies—is largely left out. Beyond Beatrice von Bismarck’s essay, which proposes to consider the curator’s distinctive practices of self-referencing and authoring of exhibitions, in connection with immaterial labor forms in the knowledge-based economy, rather than his individual personality or interests, relatively little attention is given to Szeemann’s involvement with the trends of globalization, biennialization, and re-nationalization. Although the curator worked with large-scale and market-driven formats, as well as with national exhibitions in his later career, only Kaiser’s essay specifically attends to this period, elaborating on the monumentalizing aesthetics and the ahistorical regime of his sculpture exhibitions. Szeemann’s struggle for an expography freed from academic constraints, rearranged and enacted as his signature feature reverberates through his use of language as well.

- 2 Incongruous, errant and esoteric; circular, apodictic, whimsical and yet disconcertingly earnest, his writings range from catalog essays to interviews and poetry. Translated with great attention to detail by Jonathan Blower and Elizabeth Tucker—with special emphasis not only on Szeemann’s neologisms, but also on the subtleties of his Swiss-German use of German—the edition of *Selected Writings* supports the focal points set in the catalog. Besides including the manifesto-volumes “Museum of Obsessions” and “Individual Mythologies”, which were published in German with Merve in 1981 and 1985 respectively, only a thin selection of further writings, collected under the slogan “From vision to nail” accounts for the later life of Szeemann’s exhibition enterprise. What this take on the Swiss curator interestingly points at, although perhaps unintentionally, is the widespread reinforcing of affective economies today. In particular, Szeemann’s case shows to what extent “intensity” shifted from representing a political attitude of resilience, to fuelling both the neoliberal creativity imperative and nationalist rhetoric. And yet, returning to Szeemann’s paradigm of unconditional dedication today, following these publications’ valuable inputs, might help reformulate

the question whether and how *affect* could be made viable in the current regime – beyond economic mobilization, and exploitation.