

Welcome!

The main agenda of *Seismopolite Journal of Art and Politics* is to investigate the possibility of artists and art scenes worldwide to reflect and influence their local political situation.

Many places in the world art is under pressure, situated in between the necessity of interaction with a local/ regional political context, on the one hand, and the conditions of visibility and relevance on the globalized scene of contemporary art, on the other. Perspectives and examples from places in the periphery have also had conspicuously small influence on the discussion of the political in contemporary art, which has flourished in the international art fora lately.

Seismopolite will focus on art scenes of the 'periphery' - also because many artists here experiment with new ways art can be used as a tool for social and political change - and that are relevant to the understanding of art's political function and future potential.

In particular the Journal will focus on artistic strategies to create new future trajectories in precarious socio-political situations. For example, by raising the issues of human rights, freedom of speech, minority perspectives, recapitulating history writing and cultural memory, critically examining geopolitical narratives or discussing cultural identities. Through reviews, essays, features and interviews, Seismopolite will present artists, exhibitions, cooperative projects between artists and researchers as well as other initiatives that respond to these challenges in a local/ regional perspective.

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The first issue of Seismopolite discusses several important initiatives in these directions. One of them, the Blind Dates Project, is a multidisciplinary, research-based cooperative project which questions the new master narratives that were produced in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, with a subsequent rise in nationalism, estrangement and conflict in its areas. These master narratives unjustly continue to leave a strong imprint on today's relationships between people in the region. In the project, artists with backgrounds from these alienated societies have been blind-dated, both to critically reexamine the languages through which the stories of their people and territories have been constructed, and to lay new imaginative foundations for the future.

On June 30th the exhibition Between Utopia and Dystopia opened at the University Museum of Contemporary Art (MUAC) in Mexico City. The exhibition offers the multilayered points of view of artists exploring both physical and mental spaces, as well as the socio-political and historical contexts of Asian utopias and dystopias.

In the wake of the strongly political 29th São Paulo Biennial, which was widely criticized for its curatorial framework, Museo de Arte Contemporânea (USP) presents three exhibitions that cover the period of military dictatorship in Brazil, demonstrating how art became one of the few and most efficient tools of opposition to the regime over three decades. Far more than the media coverage of the last biennial managed to do, this exhibition puts the question of art and politics, albeit retrospectively, in a local historical perspective of relevance far beyond Brazil.

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The question of memory is also central to the exhibition The Creative Act at the Henie Onstad Art Center in Oslo. Among others, the exhibition shows works by Maryam Jafri whose historical narratives and documentaries investigate the construction of the postcolonial situation, through photographic strategies of restaging. Here she juxtaposes photographic material from ceremonial transition moments in different, newly independent states. Carlos Motta approaches the political history of Columbia and the theatricality of politics by making well-known actors re-read political speeches by six assassinated, political opposition leaders, in different public places in Bogotá.

The territorial focus of this journal is not meant to provide a more “authentic” truth about “Non-Western” societies and/ or cosmologies. However such precarious contexts and initiatives as those mentioned revitalize the question of art's societal function. Elaborating on this question, Seismopolite will focus on the various economic and systemic preconditions of artistic expressions and their public function. In parallel with the gentrification and privatization of public spaces in old and new global metropolises, the increased exploitation of culture in geopolitical marketing strategies, and increased speculation in new art markets, these preconditions have undergone immense changes in the last decades. This has had consequences for contemporary art's political space as well as for the central concept of “the contemporary” on which it hinges.

In regard to the content of this concept there is very little fundamentally new to observe within the permanent flux of the global contemporary art scene, Chris Mansour points out in his response to “Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'” and “What is Contemporary Art?” in the art magazines October og e-flux. Just as unavoidably as it becomes subsumed by the infinitely more powerful dynamics of capitalism's interests and prospects, it entangles a concept of contemporary art which lacks reflexive principles and dissimulates the rules of its own transient quest for new sensations. More precisely, according to Mansour they disappear within the often applauded concept

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of an anarchistic, polyphonic now - or a conglomerate of presents.
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In the eternal recirculation of artistic commodities in contemporary art economy, in which artists become reduced to either transport-workers in an alienated form of immaterial labor or to professional entrepreneurs, to paraphrase Boris Groys (i), any links to socio-historical realities appear, if not uncoupled per definition, at least so abstract and fleeting that they struggle in vain to produce an impact apt to survive the always already expected, next craze. In practice, like many have observed, this means the artworld's often blind and ahistorical fixation with banal spectacularism packaged as inventive novelty of vision and groundbreaking analysis. One may therefore be tempted to totally reject the logic of contemporary art because it, willingly or not, actively seems to imply its own resignation concerning any long-term commitment to a societal function of art.

However, it may well be that such a rejection is neither completely fair, nor serves its purpose well. Due to the mentioned fixation with nowness we may still perhaps awkwardly be claimed to be contemporaries of the Romantics. However this is no longer so much because, as Jürgen Habermas expounded in a speech in 1980 (ii), “The new value placed on the transitory, the elusive and the ephemeral, the very celebration of dynamism, discloses a longing for an undefiled, immaculate and stable present.” (...), even though the idea of the modern has proven unpredictably difficult to get rid of in a “post-modern” age. The modernism of the 19th century's absolute present was a place where one radically erred in the search for a new, future essence of nowness, often by way of norm-breaking scandal in the confrontation of all thinkable kinds of tradition-bound rationality. However, exactly through what it negated, this consciousness of the present still guarded the memory of art perceived as a tool for social and historical progress, in accord with the reflexive principles of 18th century enlightenment. This memory does not seem so clear today. To the contrary, it may seem that contemporary art has turned the Romantics' problem upside down, in the sense that the exalted concept of the

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contemporary has become the norm, only this time without apparent
alternatives. The revitalized question of the relation between art and
politics can be read as a symptom of contemporary art's conscious or
unconscious quest for a new egress from this paradox. Seismopolite
wishes to contribute to this by combining critical examination of the
globalized concept of contemporary art and its economy, with a focus
on local contexts where art is still considered to have a political
potential.

The editor

(i) See Boris Groys: "Marx After Duchamp, or The Artist's Two Bodies", in e-flux journal #19, 2010

(ii) Habermas, Jürgen. "Modernity - an Incomplete Project." in The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture. Ed. Foster, Hal, ed. Seattle: Bay P, 1983