

ausstellung

# 4. Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art 2011

25. Sep 2011 → 25. Oct 2011



pressemittteilung nur in englisch

The Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art was established in 2003 as a part of the federal program "Culture of Russia. 2001-2006". It is one of the most important cultural events organized under the aegis of the Russian government.

The First Moscow Biennale (January 28 – February 28, 2005) generated great response both in Russia and abroad, and made serious steps towards becoming a respectable international event. The main exhibition, "Dialectics of Hope", presented projects by 41 artists from 22 countries, the idea behind the project was in defining the 21st century visual arts movement. There was also a number of special projects introducing trends in the Russian contemporary art. The Biennale's special projects and parallel program included over 50 exhibitions opening an unprecedented showcase of Russian actual art as well as European, American and Asian visual artists.

The Second Moscow Biennale (March 1 – April 1, 2007) proved the success of this large international show. The main project titled "FOOTNOTES on Geopolitics, Market and Amnesia" showed works of 115 artists from 20 countries. 5 exhibitions of the main project united by one theme were realized by different curators and curatorial teams. The project featured the shows organized at 40 venues including The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow Contemporary Art Center Winzavod, Moscow Museum of Modern Art.

The 3rd Biennale (September 24 – October 25, 2009) took place at the Garage Center of Contemporary Culture. The commissioner of the Biennale was Joseph Backstein, main project curator - Jean Hubert Martin (France). The organizing committee listed the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, Moscow Government, State Museum and Exhibition Centre ROSIZO and Moscow Biennale Art Foundation. The exhibition program of the Third Moscow Biennale included the Main Project presenting 80 artists from Europe, USA, Asia, South America, Africa and Oceania, more than 39 special projects and 7 special guest shows.

Main project

The Moscow biennale of contemporary art has honor to announce the theme of the biennale 2011 – REWRITING WORLDS

From Peter Weibel's speech: "The subject of the biennale is not like the famous phrase: philosophers have only interpreted the world, now we have to change world. These concepts are a little bit too challenging, we are more modest and we say that anybody can contribute to rewriting worlds. And art is specially the place for this, because artists have their ideas, they can, by their work, rewrite worlds. So the subject of the biennale is Rewriting worlds. How artists rewrite worlds, is what we have to show when we make the biennale, - how artists think on many levels – on technical level, on the political level, psychological level".

From Peter Weibel's speech Meeting with the journalists Moscow July, 2010

When I got the invitation to be a curator of the Moscow Biennale, I was extremely happy, because I think that Moscow at the moment is a perfect place for making an exhibition about global contemporary activities in arts. So, in this situation Moscow is a perfect place. A very famous art historian, art museum curator, art teacher from Berkeley wrote a book titled "Farewell to the idea", and this idea is modern art. My observation which I think everybody would share is that at the moment the word "modern" has been replaced by the word "contemporary". Before, when we had auctions, they were called auctions of modern art, meanwhile now the auction houses call them auctions of contemporary art. Nearly every day, every week and every month there is a new museum, and these museums are not called museums of modern art but museums of contemporary art. People have realized that an idea of modern arts was western invention, and today the attention is concentrated on the idea of contemporary arts. So now we have to find out what is contemporary. The centers of modern art have been in Paris, in Moscow, in New York, etc., and now we have a different world, and different centers for art. The theoretician Edouard Glissant speaks about the creol culture. He created a term "multi-polar world". There is not one center anymore, but there are multiple centers. He speaks about archipelago of small islands, as opposed to one big continent. It is a very good description of today situation. At this moment Moscow is a much better place than London or New York to give a look at what is contemporary, and what we will try to find out precisely is the difference of contemporary art now to the art exhibited in space of modernism. And the main concept is that when we look at the art of other cultures, we have a difficulty to apply our Western canon, which is more of a formalist canon. When we have Greenberg, for example, or the theories of LED screen in mind, and when we look at the art of Thailand or Korea or Africa, then we are tempted to say "this is not art, this is not modern art, this is a kind of ethnic art". So, we have the problem of ethnicity even in art. There is one concept which I like very much by Alfred Gell which is about agency which is a similar theory to Bruno Latour's who speaks about the actant-network theory - it is not the scientist who makes an invention, it is the relation between the laboratory, the kitchen, the system, the object – i.e. the microscope – the microscope is as important to make an invention as the scientist himself. So an object can become a person, and a person may become an object. They are all in the context, all together, the parliament of elements makes an election. And I think that this is precisely describing what the artist is doing. It is not the traditional idea we have that an individual is creating something. I am looking at the object, at the artwork is changing me, has an impression on my mind, and is also changing my behavior, and therefore a little bit changing the world. Agency means a faculty of an individual to make decisions, to make choices, and the result of these choices is that you enact on the world, you can change the world.

When you look at the world you realize that the world at the moment has new cartographies – suddenly we read about cities or about artists whose names are even very difficult for us to keep in mind – the names of Taiwan artists are very difficult for us to remember, and we have biennales all over east Asia, so we can clearly say that the cartography of the art world is re-written. And re-writing happens all over the world. In ethnography we know three stages: first, to document, and to describe. Second, to interpret. Third, to construct. 1986 James Clifford published "Writing Culture". This is concerning the third stage, that we construct even our ethnographical events. And now we are in the phase that we realize that we not only write culture, but also re-write culture. Every artist hopes to re-write culture by his work. Re-writing is also a technical term, it is not just a cultural technique. Everything that happens in the computer are so-called re-writing programs. And one of the greatest mathematical minds from Russia, his name is Markov, he was one of them who invented in the beginning of the 20th century re-writing systems, so-called Markov chains. The term itself comes from the Norwegian mathematician Axel Thue. All computer programs are basically semi-Thue systems.

So the subject of the biennale is not like the famous phrase: philosophers have only interpreted the world, now we have to change world. These concepts are a little bit too challenging, we are more modest and we say that anybody can contribute to rewriting worlds. And art is specially the place for this, because artists have their ideas, they can, by their work, rewrite worlds. So the subject of the biennale is Rewriting worlds. How artists rewrite worlds, is what we have to show when we make the biennale, - how artists think on many levels – on technical level, on the political level, psychological level.

We do not exclude any medium. This is my next point, I like to speak about media justice. We are not denying painting, but we also don't deny media. Many people think that we live in a post-media condition, that all media are equivalent. Here is an interesting example: when Catherine David made her famous Documenta in Kassel, she showed Gerhard Richter. But the joke is, she didn't show the paintings by Gerhard Richter, she showed his archive of photography. This was very clever – to show that all the paintings were essentially founded by the condition of the photography. We will show paintings – but in a very different way, which we maybe will discuss later, because painting is another activity. But also, computer-assisted art is another legal artistic activity. Therefore, there must be a biennale where we treat all media equally – objects, sculptures, installations, but also computer systems and other media work. Because we have to be just, not only prefer one media. Normally it is like this – people prefer more or less painting or sculpture. I will give you a very convincing example – when you look at the auction houses, what is sold there? Paintings and a little bit of sculptures. And the auction is the real market. Even the most famous media artists like Nam Jun Paik or Bill Viola – legendary heroes – their works are not sold at the auctions. And even, when collectors have works by Bruce Nauman, it is usually sculpture, not the video works by Bruce Nauman. So still there is some conservative tendency against media, which cannot happen because all over the world artists work with media. So our idea is - we follow the artists. Art history has to follow the artist. And artists are working, all over the world, normally, with media.

The next point is about the role of technology. People speak about mechanical mind. When I got a professorship at the university, the professors of painting have been against me. Even in 1989 in Frankfurt when I was invited by Kasper Koening to become professor in Stadeschule, all the painters came to me and said "A-ha, now you are the devil, bringing the mechanical mind to the school". Because we worked with computers and cameras and media etc.. And I said to these painters: look at this piano here, this piano is mechanical, very primitive mechanical, but with this piano you can make wonderful music. The software is important and you have to understand correctly the meaning of the word "mechanic".

It comes from Greek. Amechania means originally "helpless". You are helpless as a baby, and in many others situations. So you need an idea to get out of your state of helplessness (amechania). This idea means "mechanic". First it is the idea and second, it is a tool. I have an obstacle, a stone, I can't move the stone, so I have to invent a tool to get rid of the stone. So first was the idea how to get rid of the obstacle, how to become better, how to help myself. And then came the idea – I can help myself with a tool. So comes mechanics. So technology is nothing else than a tool to help us, to be an escape button. This is precisely at the heart of many artistic activities – to help us to understand the world, to enact our choices on the world. So you cannot separate technology from art. Even worse – the Greek divided two different systems of knowledge – "episteme" was for the free citizens which today is called science, the other one was called "techne" which included agriculture, architecture, painting etc., something for the slaves. Aristotles says that sons of the free citizens should not play the lyra, they should only listen. Somebody who can play the lyra, who can play the techne, is the slave.

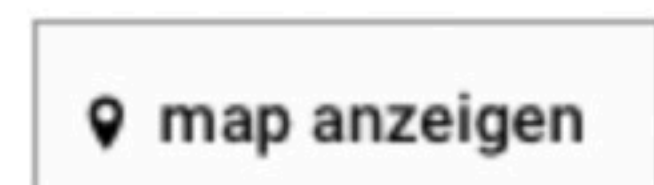
Only the French encyclopedists like Diderot voted for the mechanical art. When you look at his 56 volumes, it is all about art of mechanica, and they say: in each free society you must teach people technology. The class division in society is mirrored in the division of the arts. Therefore the condition for an emancipated society is the emancipation of all media. This is the greatest heritage of Enlightenment. Therefore it would be ridiculous to make today a biennale, when the world is full of technology, to exclude technological art.

Many philosophers speak about the disenchanting world. But technology is a new way to create a new enchanted world.

www.4th.moscowbiennale.ru/en

## Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art

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künstler / beteiligte

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Joseph Backstein, Peter Weibel