



MUSEU
D'ART CONTEMPORANI
DE BARCELONA

The Museum and Vienna-based curator Sabine Breitwieser bring together 130 works by more than 30 artists to explore the legacy of modernity and the Western canon.

‘Modernologies’ at MACBA

Title: *Modernologies. Contemporary Artists Researching Modernity and Modernism*. **Opening:** Tuesday, 22 September 2009. **Dates:** From 23 September to 17 January 2010. **Curator:** Sabine Breitwieser. **Organised and produced by:** Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA). **Travelling to:** Warsaw Museum of Modern Art.

Few people were able to see *Window Blow Out*. The year was 1976, and the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York was presenting the show *Idea as Model*, featuring new utopian proposals then being put forward by leading US architects of the day. The night before the opening, though, Gordon Matta-Clark borrowed an air gun from the artist Dennis Oppenheim and shot out the windows in one of the exhibition spaces. In the casements of these he then proceeded to mount photographs of housing projects in the South Bronx, whose windows had been smashed by the tenants themselves. These photographs that document Matta-Clark's most outstanding work, are now included in the collective exhibition *Modernologies. Contemporary Artists Researching Modernity and Modernism*. Under this title, Vienna-based curator Sabine Breitwieser and MACBA, the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, bring together 130 works by more than 30 artists to explore the legacy of modernity.

“Modernism fascinates me. Its main elements were born of general efforts to create a more egalitarian society, despite which it was politically dominated by oppressive systems, whether good old-fashioned colonialism or the economic power of global neo-colonialism”, says Ângela Ferreira, who presents a study on the *Maison Tropicale*. Prototypes of this pre-fabricated “tropical house”, designed by the French architect Jean Prouvé (1901-1984), were shipped to and installed in Niamey (Niger) and Brazzaville (Republic of Congo) and later dismantled, auctioned and acquired by collectors. Their foundations on African soil, still clearly visible, now embody the silent witnesses of how modernity is intrinsically tied to coloniality.

Curator Sabine Breitwieser emphasises that “the works on display fundamentally challenge the conditions, constraints and consequences of modernity. Furthermore, they expose ambivalences and attempt to develop new readings of the rhetoric of modernity and the concomitant grammar of modernism.” An exhibition that is at once an investigation, a critical reflection and that unfolds a map, *Modernologies* brings to MACBA a cartography of narratives, alternative points of view, lines of conflict and unresolved contradictions. Modernity, understood as an ideological and reformist movement which, whilst championing human rights, democracy, and aspiring to cultivate a universal language, also had another, “hidden” side: processes of domination and colonialism.

Over the past three decades, criticism on the project of modernity and its related content has not only generated countless activities in the academic field, but has also led to numerous works by artists researching modernity from their own perspective and with their own means. A younger generation of artists is increasingly addressing the legacy of modernity and modernism, and the failure of the utopia that these terms tend to evoke. What are the relations between these artists and the promises and formal languages generated during the modern period? In what way does that historical period find critical reflection in artworks, undergoing fresh evaluation? *Modernologies* illustrates and explores possible answers to these questions through 130 works by more than 30 artists: Anna Artaker, Alice Creischer/Andreas Siekmann, Domènec, Katja Eydel, Ângela Ferreira, Andrea Fraser, Isa Genzken, Dan Graham and Robin Hurst, Tom Holert with Claudia Honecker, Marine Hugonnier, IRWIN, Runa Islam, Klub Zwei (Simone Bader and Jo Schmeiser), John Knight, Labor k3000 (Peter Spillmann/Michael Vögeli/Marion von Osten), Louise Lawler, David Maljkovic, Dorit Margreiter, Gordon Matta-Clark, Gustav Metzger, Christian Philipp Müller, Henrik Olesen, Paulina Olowska, Falke Pisano, Mathias Poledna, Florian Pumhösl, Martha Rosler, Armando Andrade Tudela, Marion von Osten, Stephen Willats, Christopher Williams and many others in the film programme.

The exhibition explores artistic responses to modernity, both as a socio-political movement aspiring to cultivate a universal language, and its darker, hidden face: colonialism and denial of the other. A case in point is Anna Artaker, who presents a selection of ten historic photographs featuring groups of 20th-century artists, collective portraits of Surrealists, Dadaists, etc, who form part of the official history of art. Except for one woman, all are men, illustrating the extent to which the role of women has been relegated in the history of art, even in the production of and representation through documentary images. The captions do not identify the names of the male artists; on the contrary, in their place, Artaker publishes those of 'unknown' women artists who also belonged to the different groups. In this way, the artist points to the blind spots of historicisation and rewrites history.

The three exhibition sections

The works featured in the exhibition are organised around three leitmotifs: 'the production of space', illustrated by a series of projects that explore the conflicts and correspondences between the architectural space of modernity and the social and political space; 'the concept of a universal language', taking into account modernism's ideology and its attempt to creating a universal language in the form of abstract aesthetic symbols and forms; and 'the politics of display', illustrating how artists use the exhibition itself as a medium, in this way challenging the notion of the display and playing the role of quasi curators. Florian Pumhösl's work *Modernology (Triangular Atelier, 2007)*, included in this third section, alludes to the idea of an 'archaeology of modernity' developed by the Japanese architect and anthropologist Kon Wajirō (1888-1973). From this notion of cultural assimilation and transmission as a constitutive part of artistic practice, the exhibition takes its title and translates it into a plurality of processes and narratives as introduced in *Modernologies*.

The three exhibition sections not only intertwine, establishing countless dialogues, but also find continuation in several works located outside these areas, or in transition zones. One such is *Existenzminimum* (2002), by the Catalan artist Domènec, installed in the MACBA atrium.

Domènec's work takes as its reference the CIAM International Congress of Modern Architecture held in Frankfurt in 1929 with the aim of establishing universal guidelines that would make it possible to provide a decent home of minimum scale for all. Domènec's piece takes its inspiration from the commemorative work designed by Mies van der Rohe to pay tribute to Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, German left-wing leaders who worked to create a fairer society and were assassinated by paramilitary forces in 1919. The artist strips the historic monument of its original grandiloquence by recycling it into a minimal dwelling and literally assimilating it into a DIY kit. Another piece installed even before the ticket-only area starts at MACBA is by the Labor k3000 group; a website project that brings together a selection of videos available on Web platforms like YouTube, all made by the residents of huge, mass housing estates in cities in Europe and North Africa. The website was established as part of the comprehensive project *In the Desert of Modernity. Colonial Planning and After* (2008-2009) lead by Marion von Osten presented in the upper gallery. In the ground floor's rotunda, moreover, is a large installation by Isa Genzken, an artist who has achieved great international recognition and who is shown for the first time in Spain,—which illustrates the intrinsic tensions in the concept of beauty through the artist's use of decorative materials as attractive as they are cheap and ephemeral. We find ourselves confronted with the universal equivalence and exchangeability of all objects and materials, with a world that is equally utopian and apocalyptic.

On the access ramp to the exhibition rooms is *How do I make myself a body?* (2008), a multi-part installation by the Danish artist Henrik Olesen that reflects on the human body and its social use. *How do I make myself a body?* is a case study on Alan Turing, who in 1936 invented the binary code that made the birth of the computer possible, and later worked for the Allies, deciphering German military communications. After the end of World War II, in 1952, however, he was prosecuted as a homosexual and received hormone treatment aimed at "correcting" this *deviant* behaviour. Two years later, Turing committed suicide. His body was later converted into the object of abusive scientific interventions. Turing's story reflects the regulation of one's body according to the ideal of heterosexuality and is juxtaposed to fictive bodies based on quotations by fine artists and poets that allow a multiplied, sexualised body to materialise, the image of a postmodern body.

The oldest work in the show is by the artist, anti-nuclear activist and environmentalist Gustav Metzger. Dating to 1960, this is an architectural model of a project for an *Auto-Destructive Monument*. Under the headline 'Modern art will fall to bits' the Daily Express reported that 'Metzger has devised something that most people will applaud—a form of modern art which will disintegrate within a certain period of time.' The previous year, the artist had presented his *First Manifesto of Auto-Destructive Art* (1959). The most recent work featured in *Modernologies*, shown here for the first time, is a film installation by the artist Mathias Poledna, created especially for the exhibition and produced by the MACBA Foundation.

Three round tables and a film programme

Parallel to the exhibition, the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) has organised three round tables and a film programme—both also compiled by Sabine Breitwieser—that will take place at the MACBA Auditorium. Under the title **Just what is it that makes modernity and modernism for visual artists so different, so appealing today? – The politics of artistic research**, the debates will take place **from 5 to 10 pm on 23 September 2009**, and will bring

together the curator and some of the artists whose works are featured in the show. Discussion will revolve around issues relating to the attraction exercised by the idea of modernity and different artistic practises. These issues coincide with the three themes of the exhibition itself: 1. 'The production of space and (de)colonisation', with the participation of Ângela Ferreira, Runa Islam and Marion von Osten, moderated by Chus Martínez; 2. 'The idea of creating a universal language versus corporate identity and branding', with Alice Creischer/Andreas Siekmann, Tom Holert and Florian Pumhösl, moderated by Miguel López; and 3. 'The politics of display and rewriting the history of modernism', with Borut Vogelnik (IRWIN), Falke Pisano and Christian Philipp Müller, moderated by André Rottmann.

The film programme, entitled **Modernity and after**, will take place **on Wednesdays from 30 September to 28 October 2009**. The titles featured will show the way in which the audiovisual productions of some of the artists included in the exhibition establish a dialogue with works from the historic avant-gardes. Indeed, more than a complementary programme, this is yet another section of the exhibition, though set in a different location. The programme is divided into five parts, with films by the following authors: 1. 'Architecture as art, art as architecture' (Gordon Matta-Clark, Isa Genzken and Manthia Diawara); 2. 'Utopian landscapes and geopolitics' (Marine Hugonnier and Jean Vidal); 3. 'Abstraction and beyond' (David Maljkovic, László Moholy-Nagy, Armando Andrade Tudela, Oskar Fischinger, Florian Pumhösl, Percy Smith and Falke Pisano); 4. 'Performing the modern house' (Dorit Margreiter, Man Ray, Ursula Mayer, Florian Pumhösl, Hans Richter and Moira Hille); and 5. 'Modern life and after' (Paul Wolff, Rebecca Baron/Dorit Margreiter, Gordon Matta-Clark, and Marina Grzanic/Aina Šmid).

In the **accompanying publication** an additional layer is added through comprehensive essays exploring the ideology of aesthetic modernity – autonomy, authenticity and alterity, and delving into the interrelationships between modernity and coloniality, the 'other side, the dark side of modernity'. The catalogue comprises essays by Sabine Breitwieser (editor), Cornelia Klinger, Walter D. Mignolo, artists' statements generated by André Rottmann and texts on individual artists by various authors, including Inke Arns, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Sabeth Buchmann, Barbara Clausen, Helmut Draxler, Jordi Font Agulló, Matthias Michalka, Juliane Rebentisch, Anne Rorimer, Gertrud Sandqvist and Kerstin Stakemeier, among others.

The *Modernologies* exhibition will travel to the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw in Poland after its initial presentation at MACBA.

Modernologies

Contemporary Artists Researching Modernity and Modernism

23 September 2009 to 17 January 2010

Opening: 7.30 pm on Tuesday, September 22. www.macba.cat

■ **MACBA.** Plaça dels Àngels, 1. 08001 Barcelona

■ **TIMES:** Monday, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, from 11 am to 7.30 pm; Saturdays, from 10 am to 8 pm; Sundays, from 10 am to 3 pm; Tuesdays, closed.

■ **DAILY GUIDED TOURS.**

■ **ROUND TABLES:** *Just what is it that makes modernity and modernism for visual artists so different, so appealing today? – The politics of artistic research*, Wednesday, September 23, from 5 to 10 pm. MACBA Auditorium.

■ **FILM PROGRAMME:** *Modernity and after*. Wednesdays, from 30 September to 28 October 2009, at 7.30 pm. MACBA Auditorium.

Further information and photographic material:

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