

A Coffee-House Conversation on the International Art World and its Exclusions (at the time of the Istanbul Biennale)

- a two day conference in Istanbul and London at the beginning and end of the Biennale, programmed by Kahve-Society in collaboration with Osmanli Bank Contemporary Art Centre (Istanbul) and Autograph (London), 23rd September (Istanbul) & 11th November (London)

A Coffee-House Conversation on the International Art World and its Exclusions (at the time of the Istanbul Biennale) aims to explore the cultural, economic and political conditions in which art is produced, and more importantly how art/culture is disseminated in an international context. It is programmed in parallel to the Istanbul Biennale ('Egofugal', curated by Yuko Hasegawa, 22 September - 17 November 2001), in order to raise crucial contradictions about the reality of Internationalisms. The conference therefore asks: What are the conditions in which inclusion or exclusion from the International Art Scene is negotiated?

(Overall Chair) Fatih Ozguven will introduce the conversations and coordinate the plenary (He writes for 'Radikal' Newspaper on mass culture and is part of a new wave of criticism in Turkish journalism).

o First Conversation

The ideological and geographical space of the 'Art World' has been variously divided by terms such as 'Multiculturalist' during the 1980s and been in turn described as 'Internationalist' or even 'Transnational' in the 1990s. Although the relevance and significance of these terms have changed since their inception, and become commonplace in artspeak, there is little doubt they are determined by processes such as globalisation.

(Convenor) Zeynep Celik will introduce some of these post-colonial debates and terms within a historical framework (She is Professor of Architecture at New Jersey Institute of Technology, USA, and writes on urban history, the Ottoman Empire, and she co-edited the book 'Streets: Critical perspectives on public space', 1994).

Meltem Ahiska will respond to the question: How would one define modernisation, modernism and modernity in this context? (She is lecturer at Bogaziçi University, Istanbul, is interested in 'occidental fantasy', in the politics of communication technology, nationalism and gender issues). Kevin Robins will describe Turkey as an example of a culture both inside and outside Western modernity; its identity as an Islamic and/or secular modern State, stimulating contradictions and conflict, reflecting internal politics as well as global processes. (He is Professor of Communications at Goldsmith's College, London, and is interested in the cultural consequences of globalisation, with particular emphasis on media and cultural identities, and a substantive interest in Turkey).

Erden Kosova will respond to the question: What is the currency for the fashionable range of (post-colonial) terms such as translation and hybridity within this highly focussed cultural context? (He is a writer, curator and a regular contributor to 'Art-ist' journal, currently engaged in postgraduate research in London on aspects of art and global/popular culture).

o Second Conversation

This session will look at the 'international art world' as an aspect of

contemporary cultural production, aiming to investigate local and global dynamics. Whilst the economic climate of London and Istanbul stand in contrast (especially at present), both indicate some of the conditions for inclusion and exclusion in the arts. The Istanbul Biennale attracts the great and the good from around the world, and yet has questionable impact on the local art scene. Whilst London has no Biennale, the recent drive for social inclusion and the build up to the Year of Cultural Diversity in the UK (2002) are of relevance. Indeed, how parochial is an international Biennale?

(Convenor) Vasif Kortun will introduce these issues, in the context of working as the founding director of Istanbul's first contemporary art museum which will open in September 2001, and Director of Osmanli Bank Contemporary Art Centre. (He is also a writer, critic and curator, who was the chief curator of the Istanbul Biennial in 1992, and former director of the Museum of the Centre for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, USA.

Maya Balcioglu will trace the history of artistic production against the economic, cultural and political developments in Turkey, in order to address historical amnesia and the impossibility of Radical Art (She is an Artist who lives in London).

Huseyin Alpetkin will examine local interventions in the context of the Sea Elephant Travel Agency which focuses on regional studies. (He an artist, writer and lecturer at Bilgi University, and exhibits widely, particularly in the Balkans and Black Sea countries).

Eddie Chambers will look at the structures of biennales and how they model themselves on the Western Artworld at the expense of local interests (He is a curator and writer; of particular relevance is his article on the Johannesburg Biennale in 'Run Through the Jungle', 1999).

Schedule

The proposed dates for the sessions are the 23rd September 2001 in Istanbul, and 11th November 2001, in London. The timing around the beginning and end of the Istanbul Biennale both reflects the concerns of the debate, and benefits from the biennale's international profile and audience constituency. It aims to draw together artists, curators, critics and researchers in each country.

Venues

The venues (as yet unconfirmed) will be as alike as possible, allowing for free-flowing 'coffee-house' conversation, atmosphere and refreshments (but not at all like McDonalds or Starbucks).

Format

Presentations will include speakers from London, Istanbul and other locations and will be divided into two chaired sessions, following an identical format and structure in each location. The speakers will present commissioned papers in both English and Turkish (translated accordingly) which, along with the resulting discussion, will be recorded for wider distribution. The conference will be webcast, and papers will be made available on the Kahve-Society website after the event as an e-book (PDF files for easy download, but to protect author's rights).

Publicity

The conference will be advertised in one art journal in each country ('Art Monthly' and 'Art-ist'), in listings, through the Biennale, on the web

(through a mailshot and on the appropriate websites) as well as a detailed English/Turkish leaflet that outlines the concerns of the event for mailouts and strategic placing in appropriate arts venues.

The conference is organised by KahveSociety (Hatice Abdullah & Geoff Cox) in collaboration with Osmanli Bankasi Contemporary Art Centre (Vasif Kortun) and Autograph (Richard Hylton).

Kahve-Society is a new organisation that takes the idea of a 'café-society' quite literally, through the historical reference to cafés as social spaces that encourage conversations and debate on cultural matters. Kahve-Society initiates and produces a programme of artistic and creative activity that includes presentations, events, talks, and publications. All activities serve the central purpose of encouraging open debate and place contemporary arts practices within a social context. Kahve-Society is keen to support work that combines the media and performing arts, that addresses the concerns and potential of participatory practices, and supports new work that uses and comments critically upon new technologies and cultural forms in the era of globalisation. Kahve-Society is a new organisation, currently registering as an educational charity (May 2001). Its programme of activity and events are organised and administered by three trustees (Hatice Abdullah, Geoff Cox & Victoria de Rijke) in collaboration with other arts organisations, educational institutions and artists.

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Osmanli Bankasi Contemporary Art Centre is a new institution that will incorporate new media practices and contemporary art. The centre will provide services as an exhibition and research institution. It will be dedicated to experimental and innovative exhibitions; and serve as a laboratory. In addition to exhibitions, the Centre will sponsor public lectures and conferences and house an archive in the contemporary visual arts. Osmanli Bankasi Contemporary Art Centre will house the holdings of Istanbul Contemporary Art Project (ICAP), a formation initiated by Vasif Kortun upon his return to Turkey in 1998. ICAP is Istanbul's most comprehensive contemporary art library, audio, video and data archive and documentation centre.

Autograph was founded in 1988 as a centre to promote photographers in Britain who are of African, Caribbean and South Asian origin, and also to educate and inform their audience. Autograph is now a key source of information for many curators, galleries, festivals and photographic media, both nationally and internationally. Autograph has been instrumental in many debates engaging in issues of cultural diversity - and it is this increasingly culturally diverse nature of Autograph which places it on the vanguard of key debates in the UK, mainland Europe and beyond.