

THE CONCEPT

"Art-criticism and Curatorial Practices, East of the EU" A Symposium and Workshop in Conjunction with the 8th Istanbul Biennial

Istanbul, 18-21 September 2003

The Turkish Section of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA Turkey) is organizing its first International Workshop and Symposium of Art Criticism and Curatorship in conjunction with the 8th Istanbul Biennial with the support of the European Cultural Foundation (Amsterdam), the International Bureau of AICA (Paris), the International Foundation Manifesta (Amsterdam), Istanbul Bilgi University and the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts. The Symposium is conceived as a critical and theoretical contribution to the 8th Istanbul Biennial and the accompanying workshop is designed as a training opportunity for young professionals from the region East of the EU, who are engaged with the practice of art criticism, understood as an activity that ranges from writing about, to curating, exhibitions.

The Symposium which will take place at **Istanbul Bilgi University** on **20th September 2003** will focus on defining current practices in international networking and co-operation, available models and tools for co-production, funding opportunities and curatorial independence, as well as on the Istanbul Biennial, as a model within the current biennale system and within the cultural infrastructure of the region.

The 8th Istanbul Biennial, curated by Dan Cameron, will develop an artists' view of the concept of justice, as one of the most pressing issues of the day. The "concept of justice", which John Rawls has been working on since the beginning of the 1970s, is derived from Kantian philosophy and mainly focuses on the standpoint of the individual. This theory has shown up some of the ambiguities in the relationship between the individual and society, in all the contexts where society is dominated by a set of religious beliefs. Conceived before the war in Iraq, the concept has now accumulated multiple meanings and the Biennial has gained a new aspect, providing the basis for a new reading of some of its tenets.

We are very well aware that, within the course of globalisation, the concept of individual justice has transcended all national borders and state boundaries and, in the process, acquired something of a trans-national (extra-national) character, which is unmistakably associated with popular appeals to public opinion and to the legislature for the enactment of some form of blood vengeance.

The participants in **the Symposium** will be invited mainly to discuss the issue of "poetic justice", which is a crucial theme in relation to current political and economic development in the region. Specifically in relation to Dan Cameron's outline concept for the exhibition, the potential topics for discussion will include the following:

To what extent may art be regarded as a valid medium for attempting to create a consensus, to effect a reconciliation of views or to develop arguments in favour of a redefinition or enactment of justice?

Does, can, or should the International Art World act like Amnesty International, the World Wildlife Fund or Greenpeace as a citizens' advocacy group, which aims at bringing justice into the world?

Can we say that "biennials and other globally-oriented exhibitions create an environment in which the viewer experiences a temporary but nonetheless palpable representation of the entire world under a single roof or series of roofs"?

Do we think that the Biennial and other such activities have a lasting effect in our region?

And, finally, which artworks came closest to matching up to the Curator's initial statement of intent? And in what ways may they be said to have done so?

The Workshop is designed to provide a forum for discussion and the exchange of information for the young participating professionals, who are all actively engaged in the fields of visual art and culture, as critics, curators, journalists, TV producers, academics and theoreticians. Preference has been given to participants from Turkey, Greece, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Serbia Montenegro and Macedonia.

Over the past two decades, Istanbul, which provides the backdrop to the Workshop, has evolved into an important site for contemporary art exhibitions, epitomised by the Istanbul Biennial. While the city itself plays a commanding role, as a global marketplace for capital and a production site for the information economy, its cultural life has

increasingly assumed new forms and dimensions. The city offers a wide diversity of cultural experience, even though the process of globalisation has introduced a strong unifying corporate culture, which is fairly dominant in the new areas of urbanisation. This diversity derives from the continuing stream of immigration from all parts of Anatolia, in the past and neighbouring countries to the North, South and East, up to the present. The city appears as an integral part of the micro and macro narratives, representations, simulations and metaphors, which have characterised the heterogeneous art production of the past few years, since the beginning of the 1990s. In the paintings, photographs, videos and installations of a large number of artists we can trace, recognise and perceive Istanbul as a primary source of inspiration, even when it does not directly appear as the principal theme or subject of the work. Within the wider scope provided by the Biennial as a whole, the Workshop will investigate the nature of the city itself and provide young professionals from the region with an insight into the inspiration which it has provided to a wide range of artistic practitioners.

At the same time, **the Workshop** sessions will develop the themes of networking, curatorship and co-production, in the light of current and future needs for cultural interaction with the EU, and with the EU's models for cultural networking and inter-related art systems. The Workshop will further address and examine notions of the region, as a shared cultural space with a common historical/traditional background, and as a springboard for the development of a marked cultural, artistic and religious diversity. Evidently, these issues are greatly related to the program of the EU called **Enlargement of Minds**.

This has been conceived as an experimental **Workshop**, aimed at laying concrete foundations for a variety of concerted actions, including co-productions and collaborative project of all kinds. The discussions will focus on ways of conceiving and implementing a number of joint initiatives and will, it is hoped, lead to a positive commitment to future collaboration between individuals and representatives of a core group of institutions.

The one and a half days of theoretical discussions and presentation of practical examples will include a half-day visit to the venues of the Istanbul Biennial, which will serve as a model to the participants. The participants will also attend the official inauguration of the Biennial. **The Workshop** will end with a Round Table discussion lasting half a day, in which the public will be invited to take part.

The participants will also attend the Symposium.

A publication in two languages (English-Turkish) of the Workshop lectures and results as well as Symposium papers is being planned together with Istanbul Bilgi University and other potential sponsors.

It is our Association's aim to held regular symposia and workshops on art-criticism, curatorial practices, and art and cultural theory in Turkey. We hope that this inaugural event will serve as a forum for the exchange of high-quality ideas on contemporary artistic issues between internationally renowned practitioners and a younger generation of professionals from the region.