

Art and Icon

An invitation from the Fondazione Prada to a symposium on the relationship between art and the icon

9 November 2006, 4 pm

Fondazione Prada, Via Fogazzaro 36, Milan

Over the last few years, the Fondazione Prada has been concerned with various fields of inquiry, addressing themes relating not only to the visual arts but also architecture, philosophy, science, design and cinema. In this respect, the following symposia were organized: 'La Sfida' (The Challenge, 2003), 'Arte e Terrore' (Art and Terror, 2005) and 'Dialogo filosofico sul pensiero del XX secolo fra Europa e Giappone' (The Philosophical Dialogue between Europe and Japan on Twentieth-Century Thought, 2006) in which questions regarding the modern world were investigated. The next symposium – which is to be held in the Fondazione Prada's exhibition spaces – will be devoted to the relationship between art and the icon.

For centuries the highly representative and figurative content of the image has been the main subject of painting and sculpture, giving rise to clashes between different cultures, philosophies and religions that were either favourable or contrary to this practice. Today this theme has been widened to include the other media – such as photography, video and cinema – that artists have adopted to express their critical, allegorical or symbolic analyses of the contemporary world. With the advent of new art forms employing direct reproductions of reality, the debate on the 'iconic' values of art – which has its roots in the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century – has expanded, and the philosophers Massimo Cacciari and Massimo Donà, Peppino Ortoleva, an expert on the history of the media, the artists Isaac Julien, Steve McQueen, Tobias Rehberger, Pipilotti Rist and Francesco Vezzoli, and Germano Celant, the artistic director of the Fondazione Prada, will participate in a discussion on this theme.

Making use of working methods typical of the world of cinema, the artists implement a structural change within the dynamic of perception, because the cinematographic image itself requires a completely different approach from that associated with the visual arts. The film is an image in movement, which, due to its elusive nature, contrasts with permanent temporal dimension of the painting or sculpture. Its appearance in the spaces devoted to contemporary art has complex cultural consequences that regard both the phase of a work's conception and that of its enjoyment.

At the same time, the film, the true icon of the contemporary world, is, for artists, also a means for emerging from the museum and engaging in a dialogue with a wider public as a result of participating in the mechanism of film production and distribution. Nevertheless, their forays into the language of the traditional film are frequently problematic because, although they are working in what is regarded as pre-eminently a form of popular entertainment, their output is often hermetic, has an unconventional approach to the tools used to create cinema and subverts the rules on which the filmic account is based.

Those invited to discuss the philosophical, political or sociological motivations that, in the contemporary world, are at the origin of the iconic vision of cinema and its link with art, include Massimo Cacciari and Massimo Donà, who will analyse the relationship between art and icon from a philosophical point of view, and Germano Celant and Peppino Ortoleva, who will take part in a dialogue with Isaac Julien, Steve McQueen, Tobias Rehberger, Pipilotti Rist and Francesco Vezzoli, all of whom have produced – or are at present making – artist's films.

The discussion may be followed live on www.fondazioneprada.org.

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