

aica congress

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Congress

International Association of Art Critics

Beyond Walls and Wars:

Art, Politics and Multiculturalism



XXV Congress

International Association of Art Critics

Beyond Walls and Wars:

Art, Politics and Multiculturalism

AICA

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Beyond Walls and Wars

What a lovely title for our Congress, what a beautiful hope for one who still believes in a better future for those who live today in a world that leaves them unsatisfied and anxious. I'm not talking of hope for a "joyous tomorrow," but for a today that is more open and brotherly, that is free—if one means by this word "free" the possibility for everyone to take his or her personal and collective destiny in hand.

Does Art have the possibility, or the will, to play a part in this adventure? And ourselves, art critics, is it within our competence to go into this debate, which, obviously, requires considerable force?

AICA has always made a point of encouraging meetings and confrontations between those who, by their intellectual work, reflect to their own society and interpret the process of different artists in different cultures. Today, as walls are falling, as the hope for a world without wars is standing out in profile, we are called on to consider what the culture's diversity is giving as evidence.

But what would this wealth be if it weren't known or understood? Of course, the values of some mustn't become those of others; but our critical work consists of showing what comprehension artists and creators are transmitting, and how general is this comprehension.

By dint of the autonomy they gained in their academic isolation, artists run the risk, if criticism doesn't help them in their "reintroduction" to culture, of remaining sequestered in this little world of art that we all know too well.

So I see other walls, other battles announced for art criticism now that, apparently (let's be careful, attentive here and there, but let's be full of hope, too), the political mortgage seems paid off for so many people. The social battle, the battle for the senses and for understanding, the battle for Art, shouldn't get lost in mere marketing games if its mission is to change our way of looking, feeling and understanding this coming world. This battle, which is also art criticism's, requires from us a renewed reflection. This Congress is involving us in this reflection under the best auspices.

Jacques Leenhardt,

President, AICA

The XXV Congress: Beyond Walls and Wars?

Perhaps we spoke too soon. When the theme of this Congress was chosen by a few of us in that brief ecstatic interim between the toppling of the Berlin Wall and the burning of the Kuwaiti oilfields, none of us imagined that history would soon unfold the spectacle of a terrifying war in the Middle East, a brief retrograde coup in the USSR, or uncivil ethnic warfare in Yugoslavia. We chose our theme in a moment of optimism and euphoria. A moment that echoed in some distant way the hopeful utopian beginnings and not the brutal middle of this waning century, with its aftermath of toxic residues. But history moves fast in these electronic millennial times, and the outcome of recent events in Russia and the Baltics has restored some of the euphoria.

Perhaps, too, we bit off a bigger chunk of the issues than any mere gathering of art critics could comfortably chew. Multiculturalism. Ethnicity. Censorship. Post-totalitarianism. Postcolonialism. Postmodernism. Politicized art. Estheticized Politics. Engaged criticism. Our deliberately open-ended theme encompasses more than one bite. And more than one vantage point. We wanted it to be relevant to critics from all continents. The subjects that our speakers—from Eastern as well as Western Europe, South America, Africa, the Middle East, the new USSR and the old USA—will address range from the roles of native American and African-American art in this country to the appropriation and transformation of western European art in Africa and African art in South America. Our speakers will explore the various relationships between modernism, colonialism, and totalitarianism, and the various effects of politics on art and art on politics. They'll speak of advanced ethnic esthetics in places that were long ago marginalized and pushed to the peripheries—by Francophilic modernism as well as European conquest or American dominance.

A critic from the Islamic edge of Europe said to me in Poland last winter that the concept of postmodernism was very important to artists in her country because it allowed them a way to enter the international discourse of art, whereas modernism had assiduously shut them out. Another critic, from one of the formerly most repressive countries in Eastern Europe, remarked that where he comes from everybody is already a survivor of a modern utopia. This Congress may well reveal that artists and critics from the parts of the world that endured those utopias are more sophisticated about the relationship of art objects to ideology, politics, signs, symbols, societal memory and the amnesias of history—than are most of their American or European counterparts. While we in the west have been questioning the individualistic western Self and its ties to consumer society, along with modernist notions of authorship, originality and uniqueness, artists in Poland and Czechoslovakia made the posters and choreographed the strikes that led to change. Critics and curators in Moscow manned the barricades.

I hope, too, this Congress will signal that it's time, within AICA as well as outside in the real world, for multiplicity and inclusiveness rather than divisiveness and exclusion. It's time for western critics to bring "Second World" art and criticism from the former Soviet bloc countries into the dialogue; we have much to learn from them about the other side of

modernism, its obverse. It's time to listen to critics from so-called "Third World" nations whose artists have experienced the underside of modernism, its reverse. And it's time, though unfortunately our Asian colleagues may be absent from this Congress, to consider the hypermodernism and ultramodernity of the new Asia, which is sometimes referred to as the "Fourth World." Most of all, it's time to abolish the hierarchy of numbers. It's time to celebrate ethnicity without rancor, time to abolish intolerance. It's time to stop theorizing about "others:" and to listen and learn while they speak. Whoever you are, for someone else in another spot on this planet, you are the other, and they are us.

Welcome to the XXV Congress, the first ever held in the United States. That it takes place exactly one year before the 500th anniversary of Columbus' "discovery" of the New World is a nice symbolic coincidence. At our own transitional, conflicted, uncertain time on the brink of unknown global changes, issues of survival rather than progress have come to the fore. Instead of celebrating old modern notions of "supremacy" and "progress," we might commemorate 1491: the final year the original civilizations and ecosystems of this hemisphere survived intact. One meaning of the world postmodern is that art and criticism have come out of their lofty esthetic towers to redress our century's damages and wrongs. The history of twentieth century art—like the history of western civilization, has been, up to now, grossly incomplete.

Kim Levin,

President, AICA USA

Light on the Horizon

If Los Angeles art lagged over the first half of the century with only such names as Stanton MacDonald-Wright; co-founder with Morgan Russell of the Synchromist Movement in Paris (1913), and Lorser Feitelson standing out, once it caught on to the idea of modernism it rapidly surged ahead. Feitelson, one of a small coterie who had access to the Brancusi's, Duchamp's and other avant-garde works in the Walter Arensberg collection (among several so shortsightedly rejected by institutions here), evolved from his somewhat mystical Post-Surrealism of the 1930s to "hard-edge," the term L.A. art critic Jules Langsner originally coined. The term was also applied to John McLaughlin's spare, mesmerizing right-angled geometry.

It was the Ferus Gallery (1957-1966), however, that burst the cloud of conservatism that otherwise gloomed over La Cienega, then L.A.'s gallery row. Opened by Walter Hopps and artist Ed Kienholz, it represented two movements: Light and Space, revealed in Craig Kauffman's vacuum-processed "bubbles," Larry Bell's glass cubes and Robert Irwin's minimal canvases, discs and eventual scirms, and "L.A. Pop." If the latter emerged first in Billy Al Bengston's brilliantly enameled surfaces centered with chevrons or an iris, Ed Ruscha's wryly candid one-word canvases and books recognized L.A. lifestyle as the realization of Pop Culture. Indeed, the quintessential L.A. artist, his work forecast Conceptual art, which, if hardly noticed, officially arrived in the late 60s with John Baldessari's captioned snapshots of the commonplace.

Those styles vied with assemblage, which included Wallace Berman's Verifax series reflecting his ties to the Hebrew Kabbalah and George Herms's junk sculptures layered with LOVE, and expanded to walk-in installations in Kienholz's potent social commentaries. Joining the challenge were the artists of CeeJe Gallery, where Charles Garabedian and Co., UCLA-associated New Realists, held forth, defying the aesthetic prevailing in Venice, then art's local headquarters, dubbed "Plastic City" by painter-critic Peter Plagens.

Over the decade of the Sixties, and the home for Artforum 1964-67, L.A. put down roots as a major art center. Galleries burgeoned, sojourning East Coast and European artists of major stature participated in art-community events, and modern masters Richard Diebenkorn and Sam Francis opened studios on Ocean Park's Main Street. David Hockney fell in love not only with the beaches but with the canyons, Beverly Hills, Hollywood, and, most of all, backyard pools.

Light and Space spin-offs expanded the idea of finish-fetish, otherwise known as the "L.A. look," and legions of artists took to exploring materials, from sticks to sequins, from steel to sandbags, while Chicano Murals began to spread over East-side walls, the women's movement announced its presence with "Womanhouse," and social and political issues found their place in an art community that was by then firmly ensconced; shedding light that no longer sparkled and shimmered but rising as a beacon, truly illuminated all who basked in its glow.

Merle Schipper

Los Angeles:

The Art Scene in The Last Two Decades

The 1970s are known in the United States as the era of alternate spaces and alternate media and southern California typified this development. The Los Angeles art scene of the time was maintained in great part by the galvanizing presence of artist-initiative exhibition and activity centers such as the Los Angeles Institute for Contemporary Art, the Woman's Building (and related feminist sites), and other, smaller endeavors, including those undertaken by artists identified with ethnic minorities. But during this period of ambitious artist endeavors and low commercial involvement, the real support for artistic activity was in academia.

Ever since the Second World War, in fact, the backbone of artistic discourse throughout California has been the network of universities colleges and art schools stretching throughout the state from San Diego to Eureka. Despite repeated financial cutbacks sustained by the state schools these varied institutions of higher learning have provided employment and often exhibition venues for California's artists. In the 1970s, with the Los Angeles gallery scene at low ebb most colleges in southern California had their own galleries with their own curators, and nearly every one had its own art department. Thus, not only did the generations of artists born before the War have places to work and show, the generations born during and after had places to study—and later to teach and exhibit. Moreover, more than one generation of non-artists received exposure to art, contemporary and otherwise, on campus, exposure they were unlikely to get from their mostly middle-class, often rabidly conservative parents.

To some extent, this productive academicization of artistic discourse pertained throughout the United States, peaking in the 1970s—at the same time, not accidentally, as the American people finally became broadly interested in cultural pursuits. But the phenomenon was especially acute in southern California and served to produce the largest, most active generation of artists the region had ever seen. Whether trained by Allan Kaprow, Robert Irwin, Newton and Helen Harrison, Robert Heineken or John Baldessari in new forms and ideas or schooled by Richard Diebenkorn June Wayne or Tony DeLap in more traditional media, the postwar "baby-boom" generation in Los Angeles and nearby communities emerged from their schools with an unprecedented aesthetic sophistication and energy. Chris Burden, Mike Kelley, Alexis Smith, and so many other prominent and not-yet prominent talents began thus, the products of intensive (if sometimes eccentric) art education at art institutes, public and private universities, and even junior (that is, two-year) colleges.

With this generation affirming itself by the beginning of the 1980s, and a new generation of collectors, curators, and critics coming of age at about the same time, a critical mass of interest, money — private, public and corporate — and activity coalesced to define a newly vitalized art scene in Los Angeles. The establishment at this time of the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Getty Institute and Museum, and other well-endowed, self-consciously world-class institutions marked this new vitalization, and gave it a momentum and a gravity that assured its permanence. In 1984, the city organized a huge arts festival to accompany the summer Olympic Games; the success of this huge, multi-leveled effort gave Los Angeles a confidence it never had before, a confidence that it could

situate itself reasonably on the international map of the arts. By the end of 1986, when MOCA opened its new building LACMA its new wing, and ART/LA its first international art fair, a new gallery scene was aborning, primarily (but not exclusively) in the pleasant and forward-looking seaside enclave of Santa Monica.

By now, Los Angeles galleries are doing well, well enough to witness constant net growth in numbers — despite a prolonged recession. (The recession has not had the same devastating impact on the scene here as it has on the grossly over-inflated New York art world.) The Los Angeles' cultural institutions, and more than a few of its artists, are recognized worldwide. Some of these artists, it turns out, are foreign-born; the city is beginning to attract expatriate artists the way New York has for half a century. It must be admitted that critical discourse in L.A. lags behind artistic activity *per se* — less for the lack of serious critics than for a continued paucity of places to publish them. But attempts are made all the time to start journals and even move art-oriented periodicals to Los Angeles from elsewhere; and all the international magazines are trying (with varying degrees of success) to keep an eye on L.A.

The world has long kept an eye on L.A., and has long been amazed and amused by what it saw; an improbably American Riviera, a-glitter in the narcissism of its most famous industry. And Hollywood still reigns supreme in this self-anointed "tinseltown." But, while the cameras rolled and the moguls wheeled and dealt, Los Angeles itself changed. It changed from a provincial town into a big city. It changed from a desert outpost in the world's most massive (and thirstiest) oasis. And it changed from a cultural wasteland into a crucible for the arts of all types. Still more importantly, Los Angeles changed in complexion, from lily-white (with a suppressed undercurrent of brown) to rainbow-hued, as refugees from all over the world flowed in, bringing their own cuisines, customs and cultures.

The new force in Los Angeles art is the force of multiculturalism. The sons and daughters of immigrants and working-class non-Caucasian natives are getting the same arts-enriched education enjoyed by several previous generations of southern Californians. As these young Mexican-Americans, African-Americans, Vietnamese-Americans, Iranian-Americans, Ethiopian-Americans, Korean-Americans, and other hyphenated Americans come to social and economic maturity, they will create and support a yet wider range of artistic activity, a range that reflects their diverse heritages as well as their common future.

Having established itself with finality as an international art center, Los Angeles is poised at the lip of the 21st century to establish a new artistic discourse altogether. If the promise of the present era proves to be less fragile than it sometimes appears—that is, if we do enter into even the semblance of a *pax mundum*, where cultural identity is proudly displayed, genuinely appreciated and generously shared — then Los Angeles, latest port of entry for this nation of immigrants and a veritable Landscape of Babel, could well be its *locus genii*.

Peter Frank



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Beyond Walls and Wars; Art, Politics and Multiculturalism

Note: See registration table for program changes and sign-ups for optional events. A visit to the "Splendors of Mexico" exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art is not scheduled but LACMA will honor AICA membership cards on presentation. Bus transportation available to most sites: for addresses and schedule see back pages.

Thursday October 10

- 12 noon** Opening Ceremonies, Theater, Barnsdall Art Park
Greetings: Jacques Leenhardt,
International President, AICA
Kim Levin, President, American Section
Al Nodal, Manager, City of Los Angeles
Department of Cultural Affairs
- 1.30 p.m.** Picnic Lunch
- 2.30 p.m.** Visits: Municipal Gallery, Constance Mallinson
installation, "Endless Painting"
Junior Arts Center Gallery exhibition:
Robert Gil de Montes, "Ni Aquí ni Allá"
Frank Lloyd Wright's Hollyhock House
(French, Spanish language guides)
- 4-6 p.m.** La Brea/Beverly Galleries
- 6.7 p.m.** Reception: Otis/Parsons Gallery, exhibition "Being
There/Being Here: Nine Perspectives in New Italian
Art" (Merle Schipper and Giovanna Zamboni,
co-curators)
- 7.30 p.m.** Party at "The Brewery,"
E. Main Street & Moulton, Los Angeles
Reges collection, selected artists' studios,
dinner, drinks, entertainment

Friday, October 11

- 9-12 a.m.** Congress session: Santa Monica Main Library
Auditorium, 1346 Sixth Street, Santa Monica
- 12 noon** Lunch break (See Santa Monica restaurant guide)
- 2-5 p.m.** Congress session: Santa Monica Library
- 6-8 p.m.** Visit: Venice/Santa Monica Galleries
- 8-10 p.m.** Reception: Federico's, 1522 Montana Avenue,
Santa Monica
Exhibition: Eriberto's "La Locura de un Indio/The
Madness of an Indian"

Saturday, October 12

9-12 noon Congress Session: Santa Monica Library

12 noon Lunch break

2:30-5 p.m. Meeting Session, Santa Monica Library

5:30-7 p.m. La Cienega/Melrose Galleries (Print Demonstration: Gemini G.E.L., 6 p.m.)

8:00 p.m. Cocktail Buffet, Norton Collection, Santa Monica

Sunday October 13

10-11:30 a.m. Santa Monica Museum of Art
(designed by Frank Gehry)
Exhibition: "Between Worlds: Contemporary Mexican Photography"
Brunch: SMMA Patio, Co-hosted by Santa Monica Museum of Art and the Arts Commission of the City of Santa Monica

Greetings: Judy Abdo Mayor, Santa Monica
Tom Rhodes Director, SMMA
Maria de Herrera Cultural Arts Administrator, City of Santa Monica
Bruria Finkle Chairperson, Santa Monica Arts Commission

12-1:30 p.m. Invitational reception honoring AICA: Eli Broad Family Foundation (designed by Fred Fisher), Santa Monica
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Reception: Watts Towers, hosted by City of Los Angeles
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7:00 p.m. Reception: Getty Museum, Malibu

Monday October 14

9-12 a.m. Congress Session, Santa Monica Library

12:30-3 p.m. MOCA at California Plaza (designed by Arata Isozaki)
Exhibition: "Ad Reinhardt Retrospective"

Welcome: Richard Koshalek Director
Paul Schimmel Curator (member, AICA)
Exhibition: "Terry Winters" MOCA at the Temporary Contemporary (designed by Frank Gehry)

Lunch: MOCA patio
(funded by Philip Morris Companies Inc.)

3:30-4:30 p.m. Security Pacific, downtown Los Angeles, "External Fantasies and Internal Realities," (John Mandell, Jill Geigerich, Judy Chan, Laurie Pincus & others), and other corporate sites.

4:30-5:30 p.m. Reception: USC Fisher Gallery, "The Artists's Hand: Drawings from the Bank America Corporation Collection" (Artists will be present)

6-7:30 p.m. Cocktail reception, Frederick Weisman Collection, Holmby Hills

8-12 p.m. General Assembly, Santa Monica Public Library

Tuesday October 15

8:30-5:30 Post-Congress Trip led by Peter Frank (optional): Christo Installation, Cajon Pass, Ventura County,
Visits: Bakersfield Museums

Reception and informal discussion: California Institute of the Arts (CalArts)

8-10 p.m. Reading: Robert Creeley (optional), Ace Gallery, 5514 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles

Wednesday, October 16

Visit: San Francisco, led by Cecile McCann (3 days, optional)
See separate schedule

Alternative visit: La Jolla and San Diego
Exhibitions: David Hammons "Rousing the Rubble," and Mowry Baden, "I Walk the Line" San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art
Lunch hosted by SDMCA

Visit: Stuart Collection, University of California, San Diego
Exhibition: "Camera as Weapon," Museum of Photographic Art
Exhibition: "Art of the Print," San Diego Museum of Art
Reception, SDMA

Acknowledgements

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Bus Schedule and Destinations

Thursday October 10

- 11.00 a.m. From: Radisson Huntley Hotel, 1111 Second St., Santa Monica
To: Municipal Art Gallery, Barnsdall Park, 4808 Hollywood Blvd
- 3.45 p.m. From: Municipal Art Gallery
To: La Brea/Beverly Galleries, buses stopping at separate sites
- 5.30 p.m. From: La Brea/Beverly Galleries
To: Otis/Parsons Gallery, 2401 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles
- 7 p.m. From: Otis/Parsons
To: "The Brewery"
North Main Street & Moulton, L.A. 90031
- 10 p.m. Return to Huntley Hotel

Friday, October 11

- 5 p.m. From Santa Monica Public Library, Main Branch, 1343 Sixth Street.
To: Venice/Santa Monica Galleries
- 7 p.m. Return to Huntley Hotel.

Saturday, October 12

- 5.00 p.m. From: Santa Monica Public Library
To: La Cienega Melrose Galleries & Gemini, G.E.L. 8365 Melrose
- 7.30 p.m. From: Gemini G.E.L.
To: Norton Collection, 222 Adelaide Drive, Santa Monica 90402
- 10.00 p.m. Return to Huntley

Sunday October 13

- 9.30 a.m. From: Huntley Hotel
To: Santa Monica Museum of Art, 2435 Main Street
- 12 noon From: SMMA
To: Broad Foundation, 3355 Barnard Way, Santa Monica
- 1.30 p.m. Tour Options to be determined
- 6.00 p.m. From: Huntley Hotel
To: Getty Museum, Malibu
- 9.00 p.m. Return to Huntley Hotel

Monday October 14

- 11.30 a.m. From: Santa Monica Library
To: Museum of Contemporary Art, 250 So. Grand,
Los Angeles
- 3.30 p.m. From: MOCA
To: USC Fisher Gallery, Exposition Blvd. & Hoover
- 5.30 p.m. From: Fisher Gallery
To: Frederick Weisman Collection, 275 No.
Carolwood Drive, L.A.
- 8.30 p.m. Return to Huntley

Tuesday October 15

- 8.30 p.m. Optional Trip to Christo "Umbrellas," led by Peter Frank,
Departure from Huntley Hotel

Wednesday October 16

- 9.30 a.m. Departure for San Francisco
United Airlines Flight 1708, departs LAX 11.30 a.m.
- 8.30 p.m. Departure from Huntley Hotel for alternate option to San Diego
Return to Huntley early evening.