



The 35th CIHA World Congress presents a unique experiment: for the first time a CIHA congress will take place in two different locations and in two different moments: in Florence, Italy, in September 2019 and in São Paulo, Brazil, in autumn 2020. It is dedicated to the general topic of “Motion” and invites the international community of scholars to discuss fundamental aspects of art and architecture under this heading in a broad transcultural perspective, from earliest times to the present. The Congress is conceived as a strong collaboration between the two national CIHA committees, who are responsible for their respective venues and will also create formats for a dialogue between the two events such as joint sessions in each place. The venues focus on two major, though not mutually exclusive aspects of Motion: Transformation in Florence and Migration in São Paulo. The two committees are pleased to announce this intense collaboration and are looking forward to an extraordinary transcontinental debate about the most challenging concerns of art history and related fields today.

Motion: Transformation

(Florence, 1–6 September 2019)

Introduction

The Florentine venue of the 35th CIHA congress proposes the title Motion: Transformation as an invitation to study the specific “life” of artworks, artifacts and images: animation, “lifeliness”, efficacy or “emanation” are phenomena that in many cultures, since prehistoric times, are linked to crafted objects, images or rites. Be it religious energy, magical qualities or aesthetic vivification, artifacts are produced, dwell and could be consumed in a great variety of attributed forms of agency. One figure the Florentine congress wants to rethink in this horizon is that of the artist or “maker”, seen in a transcultural perspective. We might refer to the myth of Daedalus, legendary creator of automata, or to Neo-platonic philosophy of late antiquity, according to which the animated simulacrum represents an inescapable element of the link between humans and the cosmos. In subsequent Christian thought, instead, such connections could contribute to the negative conception of the idol. This is only one example which shows the multiple constellations of objects and images in specific world views and



cultural practices, often connected to astrology or political theologies. The combination of art historical and anthropological expertise could be a strong point of the congress, to better understand the position of the “animated” object in the formation and transformation of collective identities and in transcultural negotiations. In fact, the cross-cultural gaze can be a means to “vivify” the images and symbols of other cultures of the present or the past, even if often in negative terms as diabolic or inhabited by demons. On the other end of the scale is a discourse of art that attributes to works, images and created objects virtues which are due to a specific aesthetic quality of matter and shape. This can involve an appreciation of subtle crafting and ingenious vivification of representations from nature and the social world. The metamorphic dimension of such artistic creation (making one matter appear in another) contributes to the celebration of a work as magical and animated but it is important in the congress to differentiate these various dimensions, even if they are shared by many cultures. The congress invites comparative approaches or explorations of dynamics of connectivity. In its broad chronological and geographical range it is specifically interested in epochal changes and the processes of globalization under colonial or postcolonial premises.

In the context of new production methods developed during the Industrial Revolution artistic practices were cast out, whereas the aura could shift from the work of art itself to the figure of the creator. One may even think of terms of social theories such as alienation and estrangement which in their negation evoke concepts of creative work. Already evident in early movements from Romanticism to Symbolism, this “metamorphosis” was pushed further by the twentieth century through the contributions from the anthropological perspective and psychoanalytic mythologies.

Based on the above topics and considerations, the Italian committee proposes to organize the congress into the following nine sessions:

1) The divine artist

This session aims to investigate the fortune of the artist as a divine or shamanic figure in a transcultural perspective, rereading and rethinking the legend of the artist by Kris and Kurz (1934,) who discussed the concept of the artist from late classical theory of art to the Renaissance. In more recent times such a characterization would become ambiguous: the artist could appear as rather demonic and subversive on the one hand, and able of embodying a social and representative function on the other. Radically transformed by the vanguards of the early twentieth century, the artist increasingly claims for his/her work a political and social role, summed up by the famous French slogan of May 1968, “l’imagination au pouvoir”.

2) Matter and materiality: from removal to re-enactment



Shaping and transforming matter into an “eternal” or “ephemeral” work has always been one of the constituents of art discourses. Vice-versa in modernity matter has lost its importance and the category of obsolescence emerges in both industrial design and artistic production, as a manifesto of historical vanguards and of post-Second World War’s architecture. However, at the same moment in which conceptual art apparently dominated the artistic scene, other experiences re-enacted dynamics of body and matter, claiming their centrality. Today matter and discourses of materiality have become a central concern of the arts as well as of art histories, globally.

3) Art and nature. Cultures of Collecting

Contemporary collections, de-hierarchized and “innocent”, according to the “modest manifesto for new museums” by Orhan Pamuk (2012), invite us to reread Julius von Schlosser’s anthropological perspective, introduced in his studies dedicated to the Wunderkammer. From religious treasures to Cabinets of curiosities and art galleries, European collections became a display either of comparison, conflict or convergence between natural and human sciences, and a space for artifacts or natural devices from distant cultures. Metamorphosis is a key concept in all of these collections. In Modernity, collecting provoked an animated discussion to which we can refer to Aby Warburg’s Atlas, as well as to the ethno-anthropological contexts beloved by Surrealists through to the archives of conceptual art and beyond. The session welcomes papers which will confront Western perspectives with those of other cultural horizons.

4) Art and religions

The session aims to discuss the role of artifacts and images in religious practices and thought, from cult images to iconoclasm, legends such as the myth of acheiropoietia and theurgical images, spiritual and sacrificial aesthetics across cultures and religions. What is the relation of images and relics, of artefacts and the making of sacred space? What is the role of human-shaped things in Islamic, Buddhist and other contexts? What are the functions of “animating” things and notions of metamorphoses in religion and “magic” in a transcultural and transreligious perspective? What is the contribution of the visual (and that of multisensorial staging or perception) to religious experience, collective or individual, and how does art foster religious imagination or critically respond to religion and magic?

5) Sign and writing

The session aims to analyse, in a cross cultural perspective, the coincidence, convergence or differentiation between writing and drawing. On the one hand one might consider the achievements of calligraphy in Islamic and Chinese traditions; on the other hand, those of the didactic, prophetic and exegetical diagrams, including magical ones. What kind of connections can be found amongst these



various traditions? How might we characterize the separation of figurative drawing and writing in Western and other cultures?

6) The eye and the hand, from project to product

The image of architecture as a representation of a three-dimensional object appears during the first industrial revolution through the planning stage and the production: once completed, the product conserves the distinctive signs of that process of metamorphization in an interplay of thought, matter and technique. But in the post-industrial era the primacy of the process has been replaced by the absolute power of the icon, which reduces the spatial and performative potential of architecture, steering it into the advertising jargon of goods for the planetary mass cultures.

7) Artist, power, public

With changes in the traditional consideration of art celebrating power as mere superstructure, a new anthropological approach allows us to see the dynamics of images and spaces in the service of power in transitive terms: from one civilization to another, from the great ceremonial buildings of early times to the bombastic museums of postmodernity, which became spaces of social rituals where the works and objects thrive on account of the dynamic relationship, activated by the public.

8) Artists, critics, and viewers

The session invites to discuss the general statement according to which the separation between the work of art and art criticism has disappeared. The notions of authenticity, reproduction, and forgery have long been topics of discussion; furthermore the eyes of the artist, critic and viewer might now appear to be interchangeable. The session aims to investigate to what extent this new hegemony of criticism has until now undermined not only historical paradigms but also the very practice of art history.

9) Connecting session between Firenze 2019 and São Paulo 2020 will be conceived in collaboration with the Brazilian scientific committee.