

Artistic Realism and Social Abstraction

Constructing Reality in Contemporary Art and Theory



November 23–24, 2023
Fribourg University,
Avenue de l'Europe 20
CH–1700 Fribourg

In 20th-century critical realism, society as an object of artistic representation and critique was perceived to be more and more abstract and intangible. This prompted calls for a realism which sought to critically construct social reality rather than merely represent or document it.

Marxist theories argue that in capitalist modernity, reality is permeated by abstractions. These abstractions take various forms, including the economic logic of monetary exchange relations and abstract labor, the universalizing legal form of the modern subject abstracted from gendered, racialized and class domination, as well as the increasing technological mediation of social life. In these examples, abstraction is not to be understood as a conceptual detachment from reality, but as a social practice operative within it.

Our workshop puts social abstraction to the test of contemporary art:

Does the legacy of constructive realism provide artistic practice with resources that help cope with social abstraction? Can we conceive of a productive notion of realism beyond modernist or postmodernist versions of constructing the real? Can the concept of social abstraction open new paths for understanding the condition of contemporary realism?

This workshop is part of the SNSF-funded research project “Real Abstractions: Reconsidering Realisms Role of the Present” (Fribourg University / Lucerne School of Art and Design). Principal Investigators: Wolfgang Brückle, Julia Gelshorn; Organisation: Tobias Ertl.

Thursday,
November 23:
What is Social Abstraction?

MIS 03 3014
Salle de Théâtre

13:30

Wolfgang Brückle
(Lucerne School of Art and Design) and
Julia Gelshorn (Fribourg University)
• Introduction

14:00

Tobias Ertl
(Fribourg University)
• Matters of Abstraction: Brechtian Aesthetics in the 21st Century

15:00

Louis Hartnoll
(Kingston University London)
• Real or Objective Abstraction?

16:00

• Coffee Break

16:30

Alan Diaz
(Leuphana University Lüneburg)
• Cognitive Mapping Revisited

17:30

Regine Prange
(Goethe University Frankfurt)
• The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form: Jean-Luc Godard's Film Socialisme

Friday,
November 24:
Constructive Realism Today

MIS 08 0101
Espace Guggi

09:30

Sami Khatib
(Orient Institute Beirut)
• The Aesthetics of Real Abstraction

10:30

Florian Telsnig
(University of Vienna)
• Antagonistic Realism: Alexander Kluge's Theory of Labour as a Theory of Experience

11:30

• Coffee Break

12:00

Florian Endres
(Princeton University)
• On Seeing Dialectically: Photography and Abstraction

13:00

• Lunch Break

14:00

Eyck Marcus Wendt
(Leipzig University)
• (Re-)Constructing Evidence: Milo Rau's and Forensic Architecture's Legal Practice

15:00

Rahma Khazam
(University of Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne)
• Towards a Non-constructivist Realism

16:00

• End

Participation is free, registration (by e-mail to tobias.ertl@unifr.ch) is appreciated.