

European Summer School in Cultural Studies

University of Copenhagen, August 23 – 28, 2021

Art in Common(s)

Understanding Art and Communalities

Experiences of art are mostly something we have together: we gather for the live moments of music and performative art, we mingle around exhibited objects at art venues in public and semi-public spaces, we embrace the togetherness in the dark of the cinema theatre, and even literature, the solitary nature of reading notwithstanding, is a matter of sharing imaginaries, which is probably why we have in turn always been so sociable about literature in an ongoing and ubiquitous conversation at dinner tables and conferences, in journals and reading circles. Our goings about art are communal, and encountering artworks is a particular modality of being together with other people. Moreover, the social encounters that take place around art often also delineate common spaces, zones of togetherness or zones of opposition, but always zones that differ from other social spaces. The mere existence of art, and all the different uses of art, instigate social relations and social forms with a potential import also beyond the traditional realm of art.

Easy as it is to recognize this imbrication of sociality and art—in so many guises, and in countless instantiations—it has never been a core piece in modern theories of art. Aesthetic experience has been described, analysed, and investigated with a stern focus on the relation between the artwork and the beholder, between the sensuous form and the sensitive appreciation. Much less attention has been given to the collective experience, and the experience of togetherness, at play in the uses of art. This one-sidedness is itself a historical legacy of modern art. According to Arnold Hauser, the mode of existence of artworks underwent a radical change throughout the eighteenth century from being objects commissioned by authorities to being commodities brought to the marketplace and offered to anonymous buyers. Under absolutism, art was predominantly representative, celebrating sovereign and clerical powers in place, whereas in the new bourgeois context, the understanding of art came to focus less on its representative function and more on its aesthetic function. Hence, the modern understanding of artworks came to focus particularly on the qualities of the artworks themselves and the ways in which they are appreciated by their users, especially in Europe, whereas other cultures, where emphasis was put on collectivism rather than individualism, display various and different trajectories of how art was, and still is, experienced 'communally'.

In Europe, the privatization of art experience was accompanied by the emergence of a new public discursive space where the experience of art could be made into a matter of common concern, as described half a century ago by Jürgen Habermas. The modern mode of existence of artworks, then, is twofold: art is a commodity to be delectated (and fetishized, of course, as per Marx's insight in the commodity form), and art is a matter of public concern. The traditional focus on the artwork as a source of individual experiences mirrors its role as a commodity that can be purchased in the marketplace and appreciated by a consumer, and today, as highlighted by Chantal Mouffe, we increasingly experience how the framing of art as a commodity is also affecting the cultural production of critical art. The focus on the

artwork as a meeting place for an interested forum, on the other hand, highlights the way in which art actively participates in organizing commons and communities within the public sphere.

The ESSCS 2021 is dedicated to this other side of art. What is the nature of aesthetic experience, when it is no longer considered as an address to me and to my sensation, but to us and to our common sensibility? What kinds of publics are being instigated by different artworks? What is a public in the first place, and how do publics emerge around publications, concerts, exhibitions, performances? Which forms of political agency come with the public nature of art? How do publics and counter publics in and around the arts include or exclude certain forms of communality? And how can the ways in which we gather around artworks inform our understanding of democracy and of being in this world together? Moreover, what could be a decolonial path for thinking about art and communality?

The summer school will introduce an array of approaches to better understand the intersection of art and communality, historically as well as theoretically, across different artforms, genres, cultural contexts, and political situations. Through academic and artistic keynote presentations, workshops, master classes and paper sessions we will contribute to an ongoing discussion. The summer school welcomes students from the different disciplines studying art and culture as well as those concerned with the social modes of existence of art and the ways in which it contributes to our living together.

We invite proposals for contributions in the following formats:

- 20-minute academic papers (please provide a 300-word abstract)
- 1 hour topic panels (max. 4 participants) (please provide a 500-word abstract)
- Presentations of artworks or projects. We welcome proposals from artists and academics alike to perform, screen, show, or otherwise present artworks and submit them to discussion (please provide a 300-word description).
- Suggestions for texts to be discussed in workshops (please provide a 300-word argument for including a (not too long) text to the course curriculum)

Proposals should include a short bio (max. 150 words), affiliation and contact details and be submitted to artasforum@hum.ku.dk by 29 March 2021.

You will be informed whether your contribution has been accepted by 16 April 2021. PhD students are credited 3.8 ECTS if certain requirements are met.

There will be a few travel stipends available for artists without university affiliation. Please indicate if you want to apply for a stipend.

The ESSCS is an annual network-based event offering interdisciplinary research training in the fields of art and culture. The network comprises the University of Amsterdam, Leiden University, University of Copenhagen, University of Giessen, Goldsmiths College, Université de Paris VIII, the Lisbon Consortium, Ljubljana Institute for Humanities, University of Trondheim, and Catholic University Rio de Janeiro. Students outside the network are welcome to apply. Participation is subject to availability.

The Summer School is sponsored by the New Carlsberg Research Centre "Art as Forum", University of Copenhagen.

Organizing committee

- Brian Jay de Lima Ambulo (Lisbon
- Consortium) Jonas Bækgaard (University of Stavanger)
- Line Ellegaard (University of Copenhagen)
- Omar Escobar (University of Amsterdam)
- Rasmus Holmboe (University of
- Copenhagen) Amadea Kovič (Lisbon Consortium)
- Sarah Nagaty (Lisbon Consortium)
- Frederik Tygstrup (University of Copenhagen)

For questions and further information, please contact ida.albert@hum.ku.dk.