

TOPIC: interaction and conflicts between ethical and aesthetic approaches in art and art criticism

## Ethics and Aesthetics: From Opponents to Allies

To what extent is ethical engagement compatible with aesthetic practices? Why is it that contemporary archival, ethnographic or documentary installations and videos addressing political or social injustice are characterised by an aesthetic poverty and formal conservatism, not to say, in certain cases, a total disregard for aesthetics at all? Is it because aesthetic considerations introduce subjective or fictional elements, thereby undermining political or moral credibility? In other words, to paraphrase Theodor Adorno, what has happened to art's double character as autonomous and *fait social*? Questions such as these were thrown into sharp relief at the 2018 Manifesta in Palermo, where, as the art historian Susanne von Falkenhausen has pointed out, the art was largely just a pretext for civil debate and city PR – and an expression of the social and political biases and expectations, however well-meaning, not only of the artists whose work was on display but also of the viewers, curators and municipal authorities constituting their addressees.

In this paper, I will explore these and other inherent contradictions and aporias characterizing not only the contemporary 'political' work of art but also the current state of art criticism. Indeed art criticism exhibits similar contradictions: it tends to focus on historical or narrative considerations, skimming over ethical content, or critique artworks for being insufficiently 'political', or itself endorse work that is ethically suspect or politically biased. I will then propose examples of biennials, exhibitions, artworks and art criticism that balance aesthetic and political considerations, autonomy and *fait social*, without dismissing or downplaying either – thereby restoring the full integrity and richness of the work of art.

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Statement on the Congress topic

Comment la critique d'art doit-elle aborder l'ère post-vérité, où les faits objectifs ont moins d'influence que les appels à l'émotion et aux opinions personnelles ? En se taisant, en s'y mettant aussi, ou en s'y opposant ? Le 52ème Congrès de l'AICA choisit cette troisième voie.