

HERITAGE / TRANSITION / VALUES

8th ELIA LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM
29 NOVEMBER – 1 DECEMBER 2017
POZNAN

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ABSTRACTS OF THE SPEECHES

1. Russell Willis Taylor

Cultural Training Institutions: Sanctuary for Values-Based Training?

This talk will explore both the power and constraints of values within our institutions. The field of artistic training is one of the few remaining clusters of educational institutions that prepare students for the creation of excellence without the over-arching primacy of material gain. Our values must be clear and compelling -- values without meaning behind them create a culture of cynicism rather than a culture of learning. Given the uncertainty in the world, learning to meet ambiguity with creativity takes discipline and requires courage. Our values give us a compass rather than a map -- they point us toward true north in what we offer our students and the world. This session will examine the leader's role in shaping, preserving and communicating the values of an institution with all the benefits that this brings -- as well as the high cost of not nurturing enduring values.

2. Vasyl Cherepanyn

Art and Knowledge Under Attack

The talk focuses on the functioning of public institutions in the post-revolutionary situation under the conditions of war and political reaction, as well as on the connections between symbolic and real violence and its

influence on cultural processes. Today, in the age of the structural crisis of global institutions, when the maintenance of transnational status quo is being constructed on violations of borders, peripheral wars, and the emergence of new walls and conflicts, radical attitudes and hostility continue to grow and the degree of hate speech increases both on a national and international level, affecting the cultural context and the field of art and knowledge production. This talk shows how artistic, academic, and political antagonisms have developed, seen specifically from the perspective of an engaged cultural institution and art that has become a political subject.

3. Jan Sowa

From the common to neoliberalism and back. Culture and art in times of populism

It was in Poznań that a major workers' protest disrupted in June 1956 the balance of Soviet rule for the first time in postwar history. Punctual and isolated revolts evolved into a country-wide social movement over the course of following decades, culminating in the emergence of Solidarity, a 10 million strong trade union that shocked the very foundations of the regime in 1980. Solidarity's program elaborated in 1981 was a major affirmation of collective rule over social, economic and cultural reality. It was, however, never put into action. The actual transition into the free market capitalism happened along completely different guidelines and was built on the fundamental destruction of the common in the name of the private. State companies were privatized, public institutions scaled down, communities shattered and individuals disembedded from the web of their social relations. It comes as no surprise that the current populist revolt bears a very strong reference to communal identity: national, religious and racial. It is a perverted and corrupt affirmation of the common as the fundamental dimension of our very existence as human beings. Thus the only way to counter this dangerous development is to reestablish the common in its progressive forms as the central value for our thinking and our practice.

4. Ása Richardsdóttir

Addressing the conference statements that “we live in times of turmoil” and “uncertain future” – this keynote will argue this time, the present, is no more a time of turmoil and uncertainty than many other periods we compare to.

However, if we, for the sake of the argument accept these are times of “unrest” and “uncertain future” - that in itself - is an opportunity for institutes of arts. They more than any other institutions in society, should be in constant flux, regularly thrown up on the air, de-constructed and re-invented. An institute of arts which resists change, complies with the norm and seeks comfort zone, is doomed. It can persist, under the protection of an equally resistant state, but it become irrelevant, in a larger context.

This keynote will argue division in society has becoming clearer and dirt once hidden, has surfaced. An institute of arts should embrace changes and transitions in society, be at the centre of the debate.

Be a place with ample room for controversy, a space made for experiments of the currents of society.

Institutes of arts across Europe need to ask how they can address and listen to voices of fear in society, deconstruct silos of national identity and strengthen empathy and trust. This keynote will argue diversity is a value in itself and the force which comes with it needs to be empowered. Higher Arts Education Institutions have a choice; keep on with business as usual or embrace their role as central locations “for making education and culture keys of the future”.

5. Krzysztof Czyżewski

Culture & Solidarity

We return to solidarity like wanderers returning home from a long journey along the paths of liberty. It is for liberty that we have created the Cartesian worldview of the human "I" in the centre, we have also created for it the state system (in the service of the national independence), the political system (with the government elected by the majority's free will) and the economic system (based on the notions of private property and free market), and finally, we have developed the culture that puts in its centre the unfettered ego of the artist-demiurge. It took time for us to understand that liberty without equality and brotherhood brings slavery. Inhabiting sovereign nation-states we have begun to feel threatened by internal and external violence of those who had the first-hand experience of the lack of solidarity and whom we have taught that fighting for what's ours is the way of this world. In the world of the progress of civilization and growing prosperity, which we would associate with democracy and cultural and economic liberalism, we experience exacerbation of social divisions, cultural conflicts and disintegration of human relationships. In the name of freedom of nations and emancipation of the individual we rebelled against

the forms of collective slavery such as colonial imperialism, repressive state, moral conventions or cultural and religious traditions. Continually expanding the scope of individual freedoms we learnt to know the bitter taste of alienation, selfishness and loneliness among other people, as well as depression, the most common disease of liberal societies.

6. Shaurya Kumar

It's Mine, No it' Ours, Now It's Missing!

It is said that the shape of our culture is very much defined by art that shapes up in that particular era; that art and culture are very much the alter egos of one another. It reflects the thought of masses and elites, their concepts of divine and material, of purity and pollution and about their socio-political- economic values. Per Wassily Kandinsky, the famous Russian artist, - "Every work of art is the child of its age and, in many cases, the mother of our emotions. It follows that each period of culture produces an art of own which can never be repeated."ⁱ

Our recent past, and our present is defined in part by wars and conflicts that have plagued our planet. The last few decades have been particularly tragic where borders have been redrawn and migration has escalated without proportion. New identities are constructed as old narratives are rewritten; some assimilated but many forgotten. Much like the world of politics and religion, freedom, art and literature are turbulent, brawling and abrasive things. From turbulence comes spark – of creativity and revolution. It is for that reason artists and creative thinkers always find themselves in the forefront of such dialogue, becoming the torchbearers for the change . They become the avid collectors of memories and observers of frameworks. They immerse themselves in the history and imagery of memory and time and work hard to pull fallen and forgotten objects, even if temporarily.

This presentation will discuss the role of art and art institutions in the age of such uncertainty and turmoil. It will discuss the strategies and platforms that artists have employed that reflect on the past while preparing us for the future. Acting as explorers, innovators, critical thinkers and makers, they look beyond the conventions of art. The paper will explore how artists looks through objects, within and beyond, and questions not only their physical form but the purposes they serve; how they probe subject-object

relationship in a particular time and context and how their practice serves as a visual commentary on the contemporary state of ruinous affairs.

7. Magdalena Moskalewicz

This presentation considers the role of national and cultural heritage in contemporary art education and art making in the light of recently re-emergent interest in identity politics, both in academia and society at large. I will speak in my capacity as a Polish art historian and as a curator working in the American higher education system, in an attempt to have these two perspectives illuminate each other.

First, I will briefly discuss *Halka/Haiti* 18°48'05"N 72°23'01"W, the project I curated for the Polish Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015. Developed together with NYC-based Polish artists Joanna Malinowska and C.T. Jasper, *Halka/Haiti* involved bringing the most prominent Polish national opera, Stanisław Moniuszko's *Halka* (1848/1858), to the Haitian village of Cazale, which is inhabited by descendants of Polish soldiers who had fought for Haitian independence in the early 19th century. Grounded in historical events, and provoked by Werner Herzog's 1982 film *Fitzcarraldo*, *Halka/Haiti* probed the relevance of 19th-century artistic forms for the representation of national identities in a complex postcolonial context. Here, I will use *Halka/Haiti* as an example of an artistic attempt to reclaim the ossified narratives of national heritage and to use them in a subversive manner. This example is not meant as a model to follow, but simply as a point of departure for a broader conversation about the place of heritage and discourse on identity in today's art making, in postsocialist Europe and beyond.

I will dedicate the second part of my talk to discussing the role of identity politics in academia. Here, I will report a recent debate surrounding Columbia University professor Mark Lila's controversial book blaming identity politics for the failure of the American "left." I will also bring in a number of recent controversies surrounding various art exhibitions in the United States. (Dana Schutz's racially insensitive painting at the 2017 Whitney Biennale, Jimmie Durham's disputed Cherokee background, among others.) I will argue that the field of art and culture—including popular culture—became, in the United States, the site where national heritage is continuously being negotiated, and contemporary art came to play a leading role in those negotiations. To the contrary, in Poland and the

neighboring countries, national heritage is mostly understood as a site of conservative resistance against any more progressive social trends.

ⁱ Kandinsky, Wassily, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Dover Publications Inc., p.1