

Dirk Hildebrandt, Köln (Germany)

The Politics of *Modification*. Asger Jorn and a Network of European Post-War Art

May 1959. At the *Rive Gauche Gallery* in Paris Asger Jorn exhibits his series *Modifications* for the very first time. The series incorporates art objects gathered at flea markets and rag shops, which the artist has overpainted – hence tellingly modified – with gestical colour figurations. Presenting what is simultaneously an act of iconoclasm and a concise artistic intervention, *Modifications* critically addresses the very principles of modernist aesthetics. A true cultural nomad, Jorn set out to investigate these principles residing in places as various as Denmark, France, Italy, Switzerland and Morocco. Already during the 1930s Jorn gets the chance to experience the heroes of the European pre-war avant-garde first hand: Opting for an education with Wassily Kandinsky he ultimately enters Fernand Légers painting class and works for Le Corbusier. After the war Jorn himself features as creative mind and influential motivator within the European art world. A founding member of both the artist group *CoBrA* and *Situationist International*, he also helps initiate the Munich-based collective *SPUR*. Throughout these various contexts and activities, one can determine the artists' definitive concern: To reassess the role of painting as the defining medium of artistic modernism and to turn it into a decidedly political medium of expression.

This presentation investigates the reciprocal effects of an artistic aspiration manifested in various group contexts. In addition, it elucidates the repercussions of such interrelations on the very nature and role of artistic production modes and formats. The term network thereby serves to describe the effects of historical, institutional, aesthetic and political factors on Asger Jorn's artistic productions. Following this network along the lines of Jorn's work can help trace a specific narrative of European post-war art, whose common denominator relies in the politicisation of aesthetics. Thereby the term modification describes the modus operandi of this network, as well as the principle of Jorn's artistic practice. It therefore seems that a fresh look at European post-war art of the 1940s and 50s is unthinkable without reassessing historical processes through their artistic renderings.

Dirk Hildebrandt has studied art history and philosophy at the Universities of Bonn and Paris, and holds a PhD of the *University of Basel*, which he received with a doctoral thesis on North American post-war art. He has worked as an Assistant Professor at the Department for Contemporary Art History in Frankfurt, and is an Assistant Professor for Modern and Contemporary Art History at the *University of Cologne*.