

Barbara Lange, Tübingen (Germany)

Back to the Roots and Open for Experiments at the Same Time: Asger Jorn's Concept of Ceramics as a Way to Reform European Civilization

One of the most prominent artists in post-war Europe, Asger Jorn, was a true jack-of-all-trades. A painter, potter and illustrator, building decorator, writer, publisher and art theorist, networker as well as political activist, he formed a strong position to rethink the cultural identity of Europe beyond established structures. Little surprise, then, that he will be discussed at our conference from two different angles.

In my presentation I will concentrate on Jorn's interest and activities in ceramics which reached their peak during the 1950s. To him, all artisan techniques, but especially the use of clay, demonstrate the genuine human capacity of creativity. Inspired by ceramics by Miró and Picasso of the mid-1940s, Jorn began to paint on pottery in motifs which refer to Scandinavian folk art, cartoons and Art Nouveau-ornaments. He abandoned this practice, however, once he arrived in Italy in 1954. While there, he met Lucio Fontana a fellow artist who, like himself, attempted to combine the language of modernist art with a sense for mass culture – in the art world of those days often labelled as “kitsch” – in order not to reconcile cultural diversity, but to provoke irritations. For the following years Albisola in Liguria, the site of the ceramic factory *Mazzotti*, became Jorn's home and a kind of headquarter to organize a cultural reformation of a continent still torn by the war.

While for many years art history used to classify the artist's interest in clay ware only by formal means as neo-primitivism – if it did not neglect Jorn's ceramic oeuvre at all –, Karen Kurczinsky in her study on Jorn (2014) pointed out that it was instead an experimental approach to rebuild and pacify European civilization which had maneuvered itself into a dead-end street. In my presentation, I will look at this aspect in more detail. In a second step, I will put forth the question if and how Jorn's concept of ceramics may provide a model for new perspectives in art history in order to overcome the outdated structures of the Cold War.

Barbara Lange holds a chair of art history at the University of Tübingen since 2006. Having started her academic career at the University of Kiel she first became Professor at *Leipzig University*. For many years post-war art in Europe is one of her main interests. She is currently conducting the research project *Postwar Europe and the Power of Art* funded by the *German Research Foundation (DFG)*.