

International colloquium

*Art and Aesthetics: From Modernism to Contemporary*

Plenary Speaker: Prof. Tyrus Miller (University of California, Irvine)

organized by

**The Slovenian Society of Aesthetics**

in collaboration with

**University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, Department of Sociology**

PROGRAM AND BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Edited by Polona Tratnik and Jasmina Rejec

Venue:

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, Aškerčeva cesta 2, Lecture Hall 415

Date:

September 12, 2025

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# *Art and Aesthetics: From Modernism to Contemporary*

## CONCEPT AND AIM

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The symposium *Art and Aesthetics: From Modernism to Contemporary* explores aesthetic thought and artistic practices through the transformative trajectories of modernism, avant-garde movements, postmodernism, and contemporary visual culture. Taking inspiration from Aleš Erjavec's recently published volume *Art, Philosophy, and Ideology: Writings on Aesthetics and Visual Culture from the Avantgarde to Postsocialism* (edited by Tyrus Miller, Brill, 2024), the event is conceived both as a scholarly forum and as a reflection on Erjavec's lasting contribution to contemporary aesthetic theory. His work traces a movement from Marxist aesthetics toward a hybrid critical philosophy of culture, highlighting the entanglement of art with political, economic, and ideological formations.

The symposium's framework is grounded in this concern with the complex relations between art, philosophy, and ideology from the twentieth century to the present. It aims to reconsider the political-aesthetic stakes of modernism, the challenges of avant-garde practices, and the conditions of postsocialist and global contemporary art. The contributions assembled here engage with a wide range of issues, including the philosophical foundations of aesthetics, the role of images in shaping cultural experience, the avant-garde's disruptive energies, the subversive force of theatre, and the possibilities and limits of critical theory in addressing participatory and socially engaged art.

By bringing together diverse approaches—from philosophy, film and theatre studies, to visual culture and contemporary critical theory—the event encourages interdisciplinary dialogue and reflects on the continuities and ruptures that define aesthetic practices today. It seeks to illuminate how art and aesthetics traverse ideological and historical thresholds, and to reassess the philosophical bearings of aesthetic inquiry in our contemporary condition.

Program and organization committee: Polona Tratnik (chair), Tyrus Miller, Jasmina Rejec.

*Art and Aesthetics: From Modernism to Contemporary***PROGRAM**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
<b>09:15–09:30</b>	<b>GET-TOGETHER AND WELCOME</b>
<b>09:30–11:00</b>	<b>PLENARY TALK</b>
09:30–10:30	Tyrus Miller <i>The Avant-Garde Makes a Monument: Constructing History in the Image of Art</i>
10:30–11:00	Discussion
<b>11:00–11:30</b>	<b>COFFEE BREAK</b>
<b>11:30–12:30</b>	<b>SESSION 1: Avant-Garde, Theatre, and Visual Aesthetics</b>
11:30–12:00	Gašper Troha <i>Prisoners of Freedom and the Subversive Power of Theatre</i>
12:00–12:30	Valentina Hribar Sorčan <i>Why We Cannot Take Our Eyes Off Images</i>
<b>12:30–14:00</b>	<b>LUNCH BREAK</b>
<b>14:00–15:00</b>	<b>SESSION 2: Critical Theory, Participation, and Community</b>
14:00–14:30	Mojca Puncer <i>The Relevance of Critical Theory in Contemporary Aesthetics: The Case of Participation in Art</i>
14:30–15:00	Nina Seražin Lisjak <i>Aloneness and Community: Thinking with and Beyond Jacques Rancière</i>
<b>15:00–15:30</b>	<b>COFFEE BREAK</b>
<b>15:30–16:30</b>	<b>SESSION 3: Film Aesthetics</b>
15:30–16:00	Maja Krajnc <i>From Autonomy to Ideology: Political Aesthetics from the Black Wave to Contemporary Film</i>
16:00–16:30	Darko Štrajn <i>Cinematic Transcendentalism: Reading Deleuze with Schrader</i>
<b>16:30–17:15</b>	<b>ROUND TABLE</b>
16:30–17:15	Roundtable on the aesthetic contribution of Aleš Erjavec on the occasion of the Publication of his Book <i>Art, Philosophy, and Ideology: Writings on Aesthetics and Visual Culture from the Avantgarde to Postsocialism</i> , edited by Tyrus Miller. Discussant: Tyrus Miller, Mojca Puncer, Darko Štrajn, Gašper Troha. Moderator: Polona Tratnik.
<b>17:15–17:30</b>	<b>CLOSING</b>

**ABSTRACT**

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**Tyrus Miller: *The Avant-Garde Makes a Monument: Constructing History in the Image of Art***

The historical and neo-avant-gardes are often thought to define themselves through their violent rejection of the past and their activist intervention into the present with utopian impulses towards a radically transformed future, with the avant-garde work figuratively anticipating new forms of life and sociability. It is surprising, then, to observe that they also frequently experimented with artistic genres that reconceived, reconstructed, and reconfigured historical memory, including with the form of art traditionally dedicated to memory, the monument. This presentation explores how this time-honored and history-recording genre was radically diverted, reshaped and refunctioned by the avant-garde. Discussing a wide variety of 20th and 21st-century artists active in different art forms, it surveys how the monument gets increasingly nominalized and dematerialized at the hands of the avant-garde, almost to the point of symbolically interrogating and dissolving the monument's very conditions of possibility.

**ABSTRACT**

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Gašper Troha: **Prisoners of Freedom and the Subversive Power of Theatre**

Emil Filipčič's *Prisoners of Freedom* (Slovene Youth Theatre, 23 September 1982, directed by Janez Pipan) was an example of political theatre. In it, Janez Pipan revealed allusions to the period of student revolt (1968-71) and numerous comments on contemporary society. The result was a provocative performance that had the audience laughing throughout, while at the same time recognizing their own fate.

Matjaž Vipotnik designed a poster for the premiere, which was printed in Zagreb, but at the initiative of the Slovenian prosecutor's office, the Croatian state prosecutor's office banned it, and the entire print run was destroyed. The contribution will analyze the question of subversiveness in art by presenting the posters, the performance, and its reception, as well as by analyzing Vipotnik's oeuvre of theatre posters.

**ABSTRACT**

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Valentina Hribar Sorčan: **Why We Cannot Take Our Eyes Off Images**

In my contribution, I will focus on the reception of images, starting from the ontological status of our view of them. Contemporary technological advances have made viewing and producing images incredibly accessible. Why are we so attracted to images, from photographs and videos to representational approaches in art? Why are we so connected through social networks, which are based as much as possible on the transmission of images rather than text? Can the philosophy of art and historical anthropology help us understand the human relationship to images, which will not only be specifically contemporary but will also reveal its ontological continuity through time? In my analysis, I will draw on David Freedberg's theory of response, which, in his work *The Power of Images*, emphasizes that our ontological, cognitive, and psychological relationship to images cannot be understood solely through the formalism of Kant's aesthetics, which requires a disinterested, contemplative view of the object of aesthetic judgment. I believe that we will more easily understand the impulses behind the rise of visual culture in recent decades if we are familiar with the idolatry of images from the past. Philosophical writings that opposed iconoclasm justified the viewer's belief in the iconicity of the image, even to the extent that it is not merely a representation, but should truly be what it depicts. The viewer fetishizes the image. Freedberg also uses the example of paintings and sculptures from antiquity and the Renaissance depicting the naked human body to show that people responded to them emotionally and sensually because the images attracted them as if they were real people.

I would be interested to know whether it would be possible to find similar psychological and affective mechanisms in response to the diverse images we see today on social networks and in art galleries, which would help us understand why we allow them to attract our attention on a daily basis. With the advent of artificial intelligence, it has become even more difficult to distinguish between real images and simulacra, or fakes. Will cultural and technological developments change our ontological relationship with images, so that as our trust in their reality diminishes, our fetishistic attachment to them will also weaken? Or will we strive to develop tools and sharpen our eye for distinguishing lies from truth? According to Deleuze, simulacra are not necessarily a bad thing; in the field of art, for example, they can be harbingers of a new truth, whereby their fictional nature is not essential, or they can simply be a source of pleasure.

**ABSTRACT**

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**Mojca Puncer: The Relevance of Critical Theory in Contemporary Aesthetics: The Case of Participation in Art**

This paper questions the relevance of critical theory in contemporary aesthetic discourse, focusing on the phenomenon of participatory art. While participatory practices are often celebrated for their democratic and inclusive potential, this paper argues that critical theory – particularly that developed by the Frankfurt School – offers indispensable tools to interrogate the ideological, institutional and economic frameworks within which such practices operate. Through a critical engagement with thinkers such as Adorno, contemporary theorists such as Rancière and feminist writers such as Nancy Fraser, it explores how participation in the arts can both challenge and reproduce prevailing power structures. The analysis also summarizes the key findings of Aleš Erjavec's aesthetic reflections, culminating in a call for a renewed critical aesthetics that reconciles emancipatory aspirations and structural critique.

**ABSTRACT**

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Nina Sržen Lisjak: **Aloneness and Community: Thinking with and Beyond Jacques Rancière**

Conceptions of community and aloneness are often embedded in different narratives of contemporary crises, in which aloneness is understood in reductive terms. Drawing on Jacques Rancière, I propose reframing the relationship between aloneness and community as a political question. I argue that aloneness, though often implicit, is an important element in Rancière's thought, connected to community and politics on aesthetic basis. By introducing the notion of aesthetic aloneness, I suggest that the exclusive link between politics and community must be opened up, because politics also concerns aloneness, and that aloneness can carry its own political dimension.

**ABSTRACT**

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**Maja Kranjc: From Autonomy to Ideology: Political Aesthetics from the Black Wave to Contemporary Film**

This contribution connects the political aesthetics of Yugoslav Black Wave cinema with contemporary political landscape documentaries. While the Black Wave deployed fragmentation, irony, and corporeal rupture to unsettle ideological images, recent landscape films articulate political tensions through spatial absence, sensory detail, and the haunted temporality of terrain. Drawing on Aleš Erjavec's philosophy of culture, Pavle Levi's "disintegration in frames," and concepts by Rancière and Jameson, the paper explores how these films shift the locus of critique from direct address to affective geography—where history sediments in matter, and the image thinks politically through the landscape itself.

**ABSTRACT**

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**Darko Štrajn: Cinematic Transcendentalism: Reading Deleuze with Schrader**

Films of Ozu, Resnais, Welles and others led Deleuze in his seminal book *The Time-Image* (1985) to his finding of the transcendental dimension in the post-war cinema. He fully appropriates the Kant's sense of the word 'transcendental' by opposing it to the empirical and metaphysical attributes, which are forgone in the image-time. When he analyses Ozu's films, Deleuze mentions Hollywood film director Paul Schrader's interpretation of the same cineaste. He disagrees with Schrader's definition of the difference between the "everyday" and the "decisive moment" in Ozu's films; however, this not very severe disagreement turned out to be a conceptually justified definition of the difference in understanding of the subject matter. The problem is the notion of the *transcendental*, what Deleuze points out in a footnote in the relevant context of his text. Schrader's error was presumably caused by his superficial knowledge of the distinctions in the philosophy of German idealism. However, it is obvious that his use of the term, if understood strictly only in the sense of the concept of transcendence, is not entirely wrong in the final analysis. As for 'electronic image' and (at the time) nascent digital image, Deleuze remarked that the relation of it to cinema "remains to be determined." Now we have to think further on the question of transcendentalism within what is lately conceptualised as *post-image*.

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**AUTHORS**

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**Valentina Hribar Sorčan** (born 1969), PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, Department of Philosophy, where she received her bachelor degree in Philosophy and French Language and Literature. She currently lectures on the subjects of Philosophy of Art, Aesthetics, and Philosophical Anthropology. She is a member of the *Slovenian Society for Aesthetics* and *The European Association for Aesthetics*.

**Maja Krajnc** (PhD), Assist. Prof. in the Department of Film and Television at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia), is the editor of translations of monographs and anthologies of film theory, a publicist, researcher and editor-in-chief of the journal KINO!.

**Tyrus Miller** is Dean of the School of Humanities and Distinguished Professor of Art History and English at the University of California, Irvine. His books include *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (U of California P, 1999); *Singular Examples: Artistic Politics and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (Northwestern UP, 2009); *Modernism and the Frankfurt School* (Edinburgh UP, 2014); and *Georg Lukács and Critical Theory: Aesthetics, History, Utopia* (Edinburgh UP, 2022). He is also editor of *A Cambridge Companion to Wyndham Lewis* (Cambridge UP, 2016) and editor/translator of *György Lukács, The Culture of People's Democracy: Hungarian Essays on Literature, Art, and Democratic Transition* (Brill, 2012).

**Mojca Puncer** received her PhD in philosophy from the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. She is an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Maribor, Slovenia. She works as a university lecturer and independent researcher, theorist, critic, and curator in the field of contemporary art. She is a member of the International Association of Aesthetics and the Executive Committee of the Slovenian Society of Aesthetics.

**Nina Seražin Lisjak** studied philosophy and sociology of culture. She completed her PhD in philosophy in the field of aesthetics at the University of Ljubljana in 2025.

**Darko Štrajn** graduated in philosophy and sociology at the Faculty of Arts – University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, where he acquired his doctorate on Fichte's philosophy. His research comprises topics like philosophy, aesthetics, film studies, politics, education and social change. He authored six books and many book chapters as well as hundreds of other publications.

**Gašper Troha** holds a PhD from the Department of Comparative Literature and Literary Theory, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. His research interests include the sociology of literature, especially contemporary world and Slovenian drama and theatre. He has written two monographs on the history of Slovenian drama, *Ujetniki svobode* (Prisoners of Freedom, Aristej, 2015) and *Slovenska dramatika in tuji vplivi po letu 2000* (Slovenian Drama and Foreign Influences after 2000, Beletrina, 2025).