

## *Decor*

# Villa Empain, Brussels

Curators: Tino Sehgal, Dorothea von Hantelmann and Asad Raza

From 8 September 2016 to 29 January 2017

In Western societies, before the advent of the modern era, art had a different function. It decorated architecture, spaces and environments, catalysing social interactions between people. With the inception of modernity around 1800 the idea of a decorative artwork became a contradiction in terms. Painting was separated from architecture and became autonomous, thereby abandoning decoration as its primary function. Historically, this was the end of the decorative and integrated aesthetic object and the advent of the modern idea of the work of art. From now on, as Hegel writes in the *Aesthetics*, the artwork's «function is not merely filling surfaces on a wall; on the contrary, it is there on its own account.»<sup>[1]</sup> From serving a function as part of an environment, the artwork was uplifted to a position where it became a center of meaning in its own right. Now, the artwork held the position of the protagonist, aiming to occupy the place of the social exchange it had hitherto fostered. The decorative marks the zone from which the artwork has to free itself in order to become art in a modern sense. It acts as the shadow against which modern art discourse arose, which is why art wants to be anything but decorative. Why return to a point before this development now? Or could approaching the decorative today also be a movement forwards?

The modern visual artwork functions like a magnet. It attracts the viewer's gaze in order to hold it. It marks the center, claims to be the protagonist of meaning production. The decorative element functions differently. It attracts the gaze only to then release it again into its surroundings. As decor, the object simply cannot exist autonomously as it, by definition, only exists in relation to a spatial context. It cannot be the focus of all attention and meaning production as it is constitutively linked to serving a function. Modernity, in this sense, – and with it the shift from the object as decor to the autonomous artwork – is not only represented as a set of new artistic styles, forms, and content. It signifies something even more fundamental, a change in the mode of how aesthetic objects function and how they communicate. The object-as-decor is situated; it exists by definition in relation

1 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 807.

to a location and a viewer. "The nature of decoration» writes the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer «consists in performing that two-sided mediation: namely to draw the viewer's attention to itself, to satisfy his taste, and then to redirect it away from itself to the greater whole of the life context which it accompanies." [2] The autonomous artwork, in contrast, is by definition not situated. It doesn't belong. The museum was and still is the driving force behind this process of uplifting the object into this position of the non-situated protagonist. One could even say that it came to be the place where the idea of the object as a meaningful and valuable entity, in relation to which an individual recognizes and reflects on itself—a core concept of Western bourgeois culture—is epitomized. The museum is the machine that not only pulls the object away from praxis, but that creates a whole ritual to lift it to center stage.

The artists that our exhibition assembles do not participate in the specifically modern anxiety that fears the decorative capacity of artistic products and instead wishes to emancipate art from decoration. These artists embrace the decorative as a fundamental aspect of the plastic arts and see a political potential in operating with instead of denying it. This exhibition brings artistic positions together that—coming from of the field of visual art—approach the paradigm of decoration and render its mode of functioning and impact noticeable in the Villa. "Decorative," however, should in our context not be taken as merely ornamental, nor, in its negative connotation, as only superficially pleasant. The artists we invited share an ambition to categorically reconfigure the specific mode of functioning of art. They take up the decorative as a device in order to realize a different mode of art's operation, of weakening art's so called autonomy, in order to restore the object's intersubjective and social capacities. Within the context of Villa Empain—itsself a place that is highly marked by decoration—Decor is an exhibition about the decorative in modern and contemporary art and, at the same time, simply a decoration of the Villa.

Artists include:

Carl Andre, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Latifa Echakhch, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Pierre Huyghe, Waqas Khan, Jeff Koons, Milena Muzquiz, Jeroen de Rijke/Willem de Rooij, Jorge Pardo, Philippe Parreno, Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, Rosemarie Trockel and Andy Warhol.

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From 8 September 2016 to 29 January 2017

Boghossian Foundation - Villa Empain

Open from Tuesday to Sunday, from 11am to 6pm

avenue Franklin Roosevelt, 67 - 1050 Brussels

[2] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2006)

## About Tino Sehgal

Tino Sehgal, born in 1976 in London, lives and works in Berlin. He studied economics in Berlin and dance at Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen (Germany). Tino Sehgal has had solo shows at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Netherlands (2004); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2006); the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2006-07); the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2007); CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (2007); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2010); Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, Germany (2015) and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands (2015). He won the Golden Lion for best artist at the Venice Biennale in 2013 and was nominated for the Turner Prize the same year.

## About Dorothea von Hantelmann

Dorothea von Hantelmann is an art historian and a curator, based in Berlin. Her main fields of research are contemporary art and theory as well as the history and theory of exhibitions. She is currently working on a book that analyses historical changes in the social function of the art exhibition. Entitled *The exhibition: Transformations of a ritual*, the book explores exhibitions as ritual spaces in which fundamental values and categories of modern, liberal and market-based societies historically have been, and continue to be, practised and reflected.

From 2013 - 2015 von Hantelmann was *documenta* Professor at the Art Academy/ University of Kassel where she lectured on the history and meaning of *documenta*. Before taking the position in Kassel, Dorothea von Hantelmann taught art history at the Free University Berlin and was a member of the Berlin based Collaborative Research Centre *Aesthetic Experience and the Dissolution of Artistic Limits*. She is the author of *How to Do Things with Art*, one of the seminal works on performativity within contemporary art. Among the art projects/exhibitions she curated is *I promise it's political* (Museum Ludwig, Cologne 2002), *Elective Affinities* (Vienna Festival 1999), *I like Theater & Theater likes me* (Deutsches Schauspielhaus, Hamburg 2001).

## About Asad Raza

Asad Raza is an artist, producer, and writer who creates exhibitions as vibrant, temporal experiences.

His recent projects include *The Home Show*, New York (2015), *The deep past is a form of science fiction*, Frieze Projects, London (2015), and *Schema for a school* and *There is no east or west*, Ljubljana Graphic Art Biennial (2015). He also collaborated on the dramaturgy for Philippe Parreno's *H{N}YPN{Y}OSIS* (2015) at Park Avenue Armory, New York, as well as *A stroll through a fun palace*, Venice Architecture Biennale (2014), and *Solaris Chronicles*, LUMA Arles (2014). Raza has produced many exhibitions with Tino Sehgal, including presentations at the Roman Agora, Athens (2014), CCBB Rio de Janeiro (2014), Tate Modern, London (2012), and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2010). In 2013, Raza programmed the exhibition *Mayfield Depot* for the Manchester International Festival with Hans Ulrich Obrist, Alex Poots and Tino Sehgal.

Raza's writing has appeared in venues including Jan Mot Newspaper, n+1, NERO, The New Yorker, The New York Times, and TENNIS magazine.

He studied literature and film at Johns Hopkins University and NYU. Of Pakistani origin, he was born in Buffalo, New York.

## About the Boghossian Foundation

The Boghossian Foundation was created in 1992 by **Robert Boghossian** and his sons, **Jean** and **Albert**, Lebanese jewelers of Armenian origin. The Foundation realizes social and educational projects in Armenia, Belgium, Lebanon, and Switzerland. In 2006 they began restoring Brussels' historic Art Deco masterpiece, the Villa Empain. In 2010 the Foundation opened the Villa to the public as a center for art and dialogue between East and West. Since December 2015, its team has been led by **Ralph Boghossian**, **Asad Raza** and **Louma Salamé**.



### **Boghossian Foundation**

Villa Empain, Centre for art and dialogue between the cultures of the East and the West  
Avenue Franklin Roosevelt, 67 – 1050 Bruxelles  
info@boghossianfoundation.be - www.fondationboghossian.com

# Programme

**In septembre**, the Boghossian Foundation is partner of the *Brussels Gallery Weekend*. The Foundation also participates, for the first time, in *Design September* and opens the gates of her garden at the occasion of *Jardins en Fête*.

## Round table | *The Situation of Refugees, from Iraq to Calais*

With Elise Boghossian (EliseCare) and Gérard Dubois. Musical intro by Marwan Zoueini

Wednesday 14 September, at 6.30 pm

## Meeting-book signing | Laurent Gaudé

Presentation of his new novel *Ecoutez nos défaites* with Sophie Creuz, literary critic at L'Echo

Thursday 15 September, at 6.30 pm

## Performance | Artists in residency

Presentation of *Functions and Fictions* of Alvaro Urbano and *Be My Muse* of Moriah Evans

Saturday 17 September, from 11 am to 6 pm

## Lecture-performance | Slavs and Tatars

*The Tranny Tease*, third chapter of the cycle of lectures, *Embassy of Uncertain Shores*, conceived by Nicola Setari. Intervention of professor Xavier Luffin (ULB)

Wednesday 21 September, at 7 pm

## Guided tours | *Decor*

The Foundation organizes regularly guided tours of the exhibition *Decor*. The first one takes place on Sunday 18 September, at 3 pm



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# Programme

**In October**, the Foundation will host the following events in the framework of the programme *Embassy of Uncertain Shores*:

## Film screening | Cinemaximiliaan

Film screening with Cinemaximiliaan and Newcomers in Brussels

Wednesday 5 October, at 7 pm

## Lecture | *The Duck is the Uebermensch*

By Chus Martínez in collaboration with the Lieven Gevaert Research Centre and the LUCA School of Arts

Thursday 13 October, at 7 pm

## Talk | *Le Musée Imaginaire. A-t-on a besoin d'un autre musée d'art contemporaine?*

Dialogue between Régis Debray and Nicola Setari

Thursday 20 October, at 7 pm

## Lecture-performance | Slavs and Tatars

Last chapter of the cycle of lectures conceived by Nicola Setari.

Wednesday 26 October, at 7 pm

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