

L'OFFICIELART

"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose"

The return of John Armleder to Museion. From 22 September 2018 to 6 January 2019 in Bolzano

by Angelica Moschin | October 22, 2018



"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose" installation view, Museion 2018. Photos Luca Meneghel. Courtesy of the artist and Massimo De Carlo, Milan / London / Hong Kong

One, none and a hundred thousand. During his long career, John Armleder, an eclectic and unpredictable artist, he has been defined by a Fluxus artist, a quotationist, minimalist, neo-suprematist, neo-geo and much more. Labels, these, all aimed at exhausting an aspect of his artistic work and all, in the end, proved inadequate to the task. He himself smiles of a certain taxonomic frenzy that imposes the separation of an artistic expression from the other and instead says open, in full Fluxus spirit, to a contamination of genres that overturn the authoriality and redistribute it among the spectators. Exactly like when, in the '60s, within the

Groupe Ecart, he created a series of "random" works that deliberately played with the concepts of "authenticity" and "authorship" of the work of art.

Museion opens the new exhibition season with a personal one, *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* (The more things change, the more they remain the same). After the *Endless* video projected for the medial facade of the museum in 2016 and its participation in various exhibitions between 2005 and 2007, the Bolzano museum renews its collaboration with what is considered to be the most influential Swiss artist of his generation.

Moving through this exhibition allows one to witness an organized irrational event, a "living picture" or a sort of theatrical piece in which apparently unconnected sensory stimuli coexist in harmony, validating each other. The goal is not the fortuitous mix of the media, but the breaking down of the borders between universes and disciplines that are usually ignored. An operation that, at the same time, aims to circumscribe the slow but decisive passing of the witness between the elite culture and the mass culture: by adopting industrial materials and processes, gestures and daily signs, Armleder manages to create



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John Armleder in front of, "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose" installation view, Museion 2018. Photos Luca Meneghel. Courtesy of the artist and Massimo De Carlo, Milan / London / Hong Kong

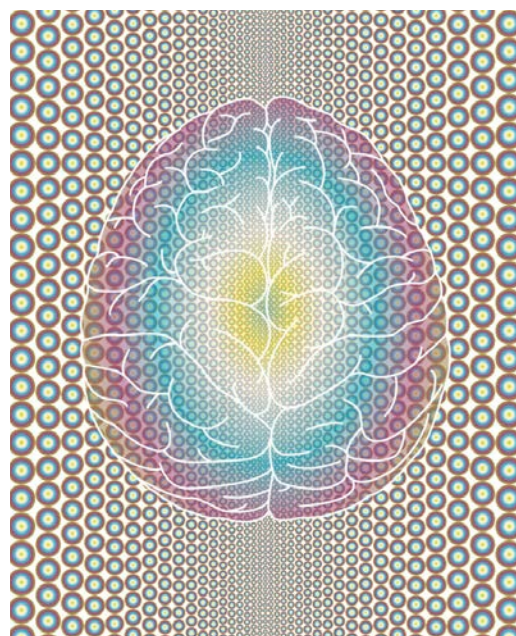
an intermediate dimension, that of décor, capable of bringing together dialectically worlds that have always been difficult to reconcile with each other, such as "high" and "low" culture, street art and art history.

In his eyes the act of decorating ceases to be a virtuosic exercise aimed at embellishing a surface to become an instrument of critical reading of reality. Because it is precisely in the style that focuses the essence of an era, its best and perhaps even a principle of resistance to a technocratic society that threatens to annihilate our creativity.

At the center of the exhibition space are three large scaffolding, the so-called "scaffoldings": two, MONDO TIKI 1 (Scaffolding) and Gogo II, passable by the public, have a "performative" role, while the other,

Gogo III, enriched with animals stuffed and real plants, has a function of scenic device and is, inter alia, a quote from an exhibition of the artist held at the MAMCO in Geneva in 2005. Sarcastic, funny or provocative, always exuberant, the "scaffoldings" born more from a reflection on art and its nature, than on its functions. Around the "scaffoldings" reflective wallpapers, variously distributed along the walls and similar to Warholian mirrors, constitute a real covering of the exhibition space as well as a sparkling and elegant tribute to the serial art of the twentieth century. Armleder has also used them on the occasion of the exhibition *Better, Quasi*, held at Massimo de Carlo in 2017. Basically, it is a sort of recycling, an adherence to experimented and consolidated art forms in the past: a form becomes effective only to the extent that it is taken from the "large supermarket of forms" and reintroduced in a sense current that is still valid today and desirable tomorrow. In the knowledge that the artist can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior and never original, all his works are configured in the sign of the after and the remake, but with a decisive added value. The fact of having witnessed firsthand the failure of some of the most revolutionary instances of Modernism, including sixty-eight, allows him to consider the past with a dry and implacable eye. "How can you be nostalgic after failing and failing to turn the world into a better place? It is simply impossible, a false trail", says the artist. Not even the compilation that you hear in the background, containing Hawaiian music, must be considered as the expression of a nostalgic feeling, but rather as yet another wallpaper, this time sound, created ad hoc by the artist to merge and mingle with the typical buzz of crowded places.

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. A cryptic title, as in the style of Armleder, but also vaguely familiar. Moreover, the Italian spectator will not be able to escape an echo of what is perhaps the most quoted and well known phrase of the *Gattopardo* di Tomasi di Lampedusa. "If we want everything to remain as it is, everything must change". History is cyclical, courses and appeals are not the chimeric invention of an obscure character of the Italian seventeenth century and art has always been, since the dawn of time, an infinite variation around the theme of the past.



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