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The World Goes Pop: The EY Exhibition, Londres: Tate Publishing, 2015. Sous la dir. de Flavia Frigeri, Jessica Morgan

German Pop, Cologne: Walther König ; Francfort: Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, 2014. Sous la dir. de Max Hollein, Martina Weinhardt

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- 1 When the history of Pop art reached the dawn of a global landscape which put New York in a central position, it overlapped with two invisible phenomena: artists on the sidelines of the western world, and women artists. Under the effect of varied means of communication, the dissemination of American culture encouraged a certain standardization. The fact remains that "there is not one universal pop but rather hundreds of iterations".¹ When the study of the competing pop involvements of activities in the United States, observed in South America and in Central Europe, replaced geographical restriction by an expanded corpus, seeking to define Pop art when exercised outside its traditional boundaries posed a problem. Might it be loaded with such complex

transnational meanings? Does a consideration of the homogenization borne along by a generic term not do away with the otherness of its varied contexts? To what extent can the traditional notions of a history of western art still be applied to global productions throughout the world? The approach adopted by a certain number of recent publications deals with these questions and the geographical enlargement of the corpus as an opportunity to reconstruct a subversive image of Pop art. When they re-include global pop within a counter-cultural history, analyses underscore the impact of the process involving a change of historiographical pop paradigm, from simulacrum model to so-called referential re-readings, undertaken by Benjamin Buchloh, Hal Foster, Richard Meyer and Douglas Crimp. In 1999, in his essay *Getting the Warhol We Deserve*, this latter analyzed the capacity of Pop art, as an object of study, to get over the crisis posed by a modernist art history. By situating his works in a permanently off-centred place with regard to all the cultural and social codes of art history, Andy Warhol—and herein lies the “Warhol effect”—would reveal the inadequate interdisciplinarity of art history insofar as he undertook a task of undermining culture, and forced the historian to “escape from the confines of art history so as to pull us towards other horizons”.²

- 2 Taking the call to explore other horizons literally, a whole swathe of present-day historiography expands the place of Pop art, and derives from it a new corpus broached in an above all historical project, as is illustrated by the place granted to the genesis of global pop expressions. The phenomenon of historicization proceeds above all by way of a selection of very numerous and often little-known works, an approach which illustrates the keen interest shown by recent exhibitions in a renewal of the bodies of works. Through the different São Paulo Biennials, held in the 1960s, one of the “physical encounters between North American Pop art with [local] realist pop trends”³, and the work of Glauco Rodrigues, Raymundo Colares, Antonio Dias, and Marcello Nitsche, we accordingly discover that Brazilian art appropriated the language of Pop art, be it plastic (aluminium, vinyl on wood, glass fibre) or technical (collage, assemblage, relief). At the same time, the approach to everyday reality at play here turned out to be critical in relation to the artistic means of Pop art, while its forays towards volume took precedence over painting. This twofold movement, somewhere between assimilating and going beyond the American model, gave rise to the birth of the *nova objetividade*, to use Helio Oiticica’s term.⁴ For this latter, who believed in the specific nature of Brazilian art, the cannibalism of American sources was a sign of a continuity with the man-eating tendency, launched by the Brazilian Oswald de Andrade in 1928. The transposition of rivalry in history, with which the New Objectivity movement proceeded, hallmarked the desire to situate the importance of Brazil in the construction of artistic events, present and past alike, these latter having the capacity to make the Brazilian modernism of the 1920s the source of South American Pop, and enable the off-centred narrative of “plural modernities” to have its influence. For their part, among other renewed projects about a figure of paramount importance, the cultural and theoretical sources of worldwide Pop art are the object of the critical anthology about Lawrence Alloway, published by the Getty Research Institute. His thinking already supposedly embryonically contained the ferment of an internationalized vision, as examined by Michael Lobel in an essay explaining that “Alloway positions himself versus critical approaches which, in an essentialist way, connect art praxes to national identities”, and that, more specifically, “he rejects the contrasts between European culture, as static and ancient, and American culture, as a moveable frontier”.⁵

- 3 In dramatizing local research, for some, and marking a halt for others, the diverse effects of the discovery of Pop art on an international scale are unable to form a unified response. Better still, a certain number of works seem to take as their subject the trans-cultural encounter and the dialectic of transfer. Such a situation could not be more visible than it is in Eastern Europe, whose geopolitical stance might at first glance encourage a polarized reception of American Pop art. The fact remains, as is noted by the authors of *German Pop: eine Einführung in die Ausstellung* and Sarah Wilson, that “Pop art is not just an expression of capitalism or a subversive signal of a free East, of the countries lying behind the Iron Curtain”.⁶ Following in the footsteps of this latter author, taking as his context the age of Leonid Brezhnev, who was keen “to provide edifying images” of Soviet progress, David Crowley is interested in Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, two opponents of the Soviet regime, especially after they had been victims of the actual destruction of their works during the street exhibition called *Bulldozer* (when their double self-portrait as Lenin and Stalin was demolished by the authorities). In 1974, in producing unusual paraphrases of Robert Indiana (*The Confederacy: Alabama*), Roy Lichtenstein (*Bratatat*) and Andy Warhol (*Campbell's Soup Can*), Komar and Melamid captured the moment when the image was shattered, and suggested what “the proper archival image of [Pop] art”⁷ might look like, were it subjected to a destructive process. When they used Pop art in a parody of Soviet art, rather than through iconography, Melamid and Komar were thus steered by its *conceptualism*, a certain reflexive relation between art and American society: “If Pop art was meant to be a result of the over-production of goods and advertisements, Soviet art emerged from an over-production of Soviet ideology and its visual propaganda”.⁸
- 4 As is revealed by Crowley's study, questioning the current critical state of global pop lends itself to making use of a preferred theoretical model: visual studies. Generally speaking, studies on the art of the Eastern Bloc in this current critical state expose a phenomenon involving a historiographical grasp which hallmarks the influence of the project dealing with the visual history of Pop art undertaken by Hal Foster, in particular, who is keen to “historicize the modern vision, and specify dominant praxes and critical resistances”.⁹ The way David Crowley and Dávid Féher deal with visual issues transposes to the study of Eastern European art an approach usually reserved for American Pop art. When Dávid Féher studies Pop art in Hungary and Poland, his interest lies quite precisely in the visual effects produced by the two competing systems during the Cold War. In Roman Cieślewicz's cover for *Opus International* (1968), based on duplication, he sees the emblem of the way creative activity works under Communist rule and the sign of an “ambivalent dichotomy”.¹⁰ According to him this double portrait of the super powers as supermen wearing the colours of the USSR and the USA shows the kinship between the two systems which are lent tangible substance in the works, visually and conceptually alike, we might add, through the terms which give them publicity, on both sides of the Atlantic, from *capitalist realism* (Gerhard Richter) to *communism* (Andy Warhol). As such, Féher's thesis to do with Eastern pop evokes the research undertaken by James E. Curley, a follower of Foster, who coined the concept of *cold war visuality* in “A Conspiracy of Images, Andy Warhol, Gerhard Richter and the Art of the Cold War”, in order to deal with the way the Cold War acted on perception, and defend the idea that on both sides of the Iron Curtain a common visuality would be observed. Lastly, to wind up this overview of the fertile filter of *visual studies* in the current critical state on global pop, we must mention Alain Cueff's essay on Alain Jacquet. Although the author does not explicitly

refer to this canon, his essay on the duplicity of *Camouflages* (started in 1962) confirms the relevance of the approach. He evokes the “science of camouflage” by going back to 1828 and military uniforms, before examining the way in which Jacquet “plays on the co-existence of images, [by] constructing and deconstructing the codes in order to produce a third image from duplicitous images”.¹¹ We can clearly see how the visual reference to war is duplicated as a motif and as a way of seeing things, as if Jacquet were painting coding and fusion, i.e., two of the conditions of perception in time of war.

- 5 If certain leitmotifs seem to typify the corpus of global pop, in the encounter that is stirred up by the general centre/periphery diagram and all the convergent tensions that it contains, the subjectivity of artists appears all the more vividly because it is being constantly put to the test by the media-related mechanisms of globalization, and by exchanges and interactions. What happens to the formation of the subject under the invasion of American advertising in particular, when the individual is at once its trophy and its victim? It is probably because identity and subjectivity are made problematic by the globalized ethos of the 1960s that these two notions reappear in a forceful way. Kalliopi Minioudaki's essay “Feminist Eruptions in Pop, Beyond Borders”,¹² strives precisely to show the extent to which the obliteration of the feminist dimension of pop is bound up with that of its globalized forms of expression. Within this “spatialized engagement” (Marsha Meskinmon), pop feminist approaches supposedly converge, we are told by Kalliopi Minioudaki, around the project asserting a feminine subjectivity, capable of undermining Pop art, from within, through the presentation of an aesthetic which questions the *other*. In global pop, the author explains, women artists pounce on “the divergence in the treatment of commonplace objects”, resulting from ways of doing things which, well removed from any pure fact, “capture the relentless diversity of pop”.¹³ Minioudaki emphasizes that the difference functions first of all on a formal level, with the interaction proposed by the former, and their “essentially deconstructive”¹⁴ effects contrasting with the works of the latter, which play on pure fact. In other words, the critical strength of their works has to do with the capacity of the visual means, including the “re-conceptualization” of symbols and appropriation, to re-enact the break-up of genders caused by the gap introduced by women pop artists with regard to their male counterparts. In terms of method, the author becomes involved in a study of differentiation at the level of themes, which lend visibility to the claim of the female through the imagery of the domestic world and the description of the preparations of representation. For example, the author deconstructs the theme of the conquest of space, in which she sees an aspiration to go beyond gender, and the sublimation of earthly power plays, thus showing how a renewal of feminist themes comes about. This kind of mapping of female themes calls to mind the significance of the methods of Lucy R. Lippard, who, however, is not explicitly quoted. In 1976, and ten years after her pioneering study of Pop art, Lucy R. Lippard started to devote her work to women, suggesting that female forms of *modus operandi* incorporated a specific relation to work, the recognition of the emotional content, and the enhancement of popular art, a dimension which transcended the objects that she was examining.¹⁵
- 6 As is indicated by this slight discrepancy between historical analysis and theoretical corpus, the use made by the current critical state of things of new methodological tools remains ambiguous. The ambiguity has to do, first and foremost, with the depreciation of theoretical sources. It then has to do with the capacity of recent texts about global pop to answer the problem of the renewal of historiography in a duplicated way. On the one

hand, this kind of current situation rubber-stamps the lasting renewal of the historiography of Pop art, that of the shift from the simulacrum model to the referential model, typified by the re-appraisal of the critical potential of Pop art. On the other hand, from the angle of the general historiographical debate, it emerges that the impact of recent theoretical tendencies becomes tangible above all through the investment of visual studies in the framework of the visibility of the Cold War, limited as it is with regard to feminist studies and probably insufficiently used where post-colonial studies are concerned. Bearing in mind the project involving an assumed geographical enlargement, this represents nothing less than a paradox. Here, to be sure, we find traces of the post-colonial glossary, here in the use of the term *border*, and there in the term *beyond*. But it often dispenses with a confrontation with the works which, it just so happens, reveal a recurrent structure, connected to the method of the intercultural encounter and the perception of the imperialist model seen through the lens of a specific culture, which are terms at the heart of post-colonial studies. It actually seems that, for an author like Jessica Morgan, global pop lends itself more to the study of the cultural encounter than to the idea of an inter-cultural encounter, as is illustrated by the summoning of critical theory. To describe the subversion of the language of the other, which, she aptly notes, describes global pop, Jessica Morgan chooses the “performative contradiction”¹⁶ notion, borrowed from Jürgen Habermas. For this reason, writings by authors who test the global territory represent a partial culmination of Douglas Crimp’s call to occupy new critical turf in the study of Pop art—a call long understood as an order to analyze Pop art through the filter of *cultural studies* and *queer studies*, capable, in his view, of “describing the political and historical challenges of art, and the historicity of forms”.¹⁷ The “new horizons”¹⁸ are here used in an above all physical way. But the fact of not making full use of the new methodologies seems to be less the outcome of an effect of display or analytical boundaries—Kalliopi Minioudaki, one of the authors studied, is incidentally responsible for a longer study titled *Seduction and Subversion* (2010)—than the concerted choice of curators giving precedence to the project of historicization over theorization. It would seem, once and for all, that the decision of an author such as Carl Jacobs¹⁹ to retrace history to the detriment of any conceptual notion betrays an assumed vision of the exhibition aimed at the writing of a history which would proceed above all through works.

NOTES

1. Morgan, Jessica. “Political Pop: An Introduction”, *The World Goes Pop: the EY Exhibition*, London : Tate Modern, 2015, p. 16
2. Crimp, Douglas. “Avoir le Warhol qu’on mérite”, in *Le Tournant populaire des Cultural Studies : l’histoire de l’art face à une nouvelle cartographie du goût (1964-2008)* (edited by Annie Claustres). Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2013, (Œuvres en société), p. 349
3. Lamoni, Giulia. “Unfolding the ‘Present’ Some Notes on Brazilian ‘Pop’”, *The World Goes Pop, Op.cit.*, p. 59

4. Oiticica, Helio. "Situação da vanguarda no Brasil, 1966", quoted in : Lamoni, Giulia, "Unfolding the 'Present': Some Notes on Brazilian 'Pop'", *The World Goes Pop*, op. cit., p. 62
5. Lobel, Michael. "Spatial. Disorientation. Patterns", *Lawrence Alloway: Critic and Curator*, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015, p. 83
6. Wilson, Sarah. "Children of Marx and Coca-Cola", *The World Goes Pop*, Op.cit., p. 113
7. Quoted in Crowley, David. "Pop Effects in Eastern Europe under Communist Rule", *The World Goes Pop*, op. cit., p. 25
8. Komar, Vitaly. "The Avant-Garde, Sots-Art and the Bulldozer Exhibition", 1974, quoted in : Féher, Dávid. "The 'Pop Problem' – Pop Art and East Central Europe", *Ludwig Goes Pop + The East Side Story*, Budapest: Nemzeti Kulturális Alap, 2015, p. 126
9. Quoted by Curley, John J. *A Conspiracy of Images*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013, p. 7
10. Féher, Dávid. "The 'Pop Problem' – Pop Art and East Central Europe", *Ludwig Goes Pop + The East Side Story*, op. cit., p. 126
11. Cueff, Alain. "Images duplices, peintures cannibales", *Alain Jacquet : des images d'Epinal aux Camouflages (1961-1963)*, Paris : Galerie Georges-Philippe et Nathalie Vallois, 2015
12. Minioudaki, Kalliopi. "Feminist Eruptions in Pop, Beyond Borders", *The World Goes Pop*, op. cit., p. 73-94
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. For a concise approach to Lucy R. Lippard's contribution to feminist theories, see: Dumont, Fabienne. *Théories féministes en art et histoire : un long combat intensifié depuis les années 1970*, 2007, online edition <http://www.artsetsocietes.org/seminaireantibes/f/f-dumont.html>
16. Morgan, Jessica. "Political Pop: An Introduction", *The World Goes Pop*, op. cit., p. 20
17. Crimp, Douglas. "Getting the Warhol we deserve", in *Le Tournant populaire des Cultural Studies : l'histoire de l'art face à une nouvelle cartographie du goût (1964-2008)*, Op.cit., p. 349
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Pop Art in Belgium ! : een/un coup de foudre*, Bruxelles : ING Belgium : Fonds Mercator, 2015