

This book, *Retrospective: Aesthetics and Art in the 20th Century* is a compilation of the papers submitted and discussions held at the SANART symposium, of the same title, that took place in June 2001 at Middle East Technical University.

Why this topic? Why now? SANART is the only association of aesthetics in Turkey. It has the mission of enthusing and building up a public for the raised awareness of issues related with aesthetics and art. For the past ten years now, it has carried this mission to the practical realm in Ankara, where it is based, through the organisation of symposia, exhibitions and publications. To coincide with the closure of the twentieth century, on its tenth year, SANART decided to re-evaluate the century in terms of various approaches to the field of aesthetics and art. Twelve participants, who were invited and whose texts are included in this book, were asked to bring forth specific issues within the general problematic of the twentieth century. The objective was more to do with understanding our concerns with the new century, while reflecting upon the previous one, than providing all encompassing accounts of historiography.

Why the book? Publications are very important for SANART because as an association it seeks to maintain permanence in the cultural sphere of Turkey, and to achieve that permanence, although the continuity of temporal events help, it is essential to accumulate written material. All of the symposia that SANART has organised have been published or are pending publication. Because of the significance and timely relevance of the topic, this book aims to disseminate the ideas discussed in the symposium to a wider public than that of the locality of Ankara, to a world audience, which is why it has been decided to publish it in English.

The programme of the symposium was arranged so that the first half focused on art work and aesthetics followed by the “avant-garde” discussion and the second half concentrated on issues of architecture, politics and aesthetics. In editing the book, the order of the sessions of the symposium was maintained so that the lines of thought that emerged during the Symposium can be followed in the Discussion and Afterwords without much difficulty.

In an overview of the texts, it is possible to discern that one of the major shifts that occurred in art in the twentieth century was that with the advent of new technologies and the possibility of wider dissemination, artists vocally assumed new roles to themselves while simultaneously critics and theoreticians assigned new tasks to the domain of art.

Rana Nergis Ödüt, arguing that twentieth century aesthetic discourse was widely dominated by the instrumental rationality of positivist modernism, which conceived aesthetics as an unreliable source of knowledge, poses phenomenological thinking and dialogical rationality as vehicles that are to be used in overcoming the alienation of the aesthetic realm from everyday life. Aleš Erhavec explains that the philosophy and aesthetics of Adorno and Heidegger, share the common preoccupation that art offered a privileged entry to truth. Hasan Ünal Nalbantođlu furthers the discussion on the contemporary understanding of aesthetics as a means of reaching truth, and expresses his concerns with the increasingly technologised world market of art objects/commodities that present a constant danger to the transformative power of the works of art on the individual perceiver.

Alongside the question of truth, the autonomy of art and aesthetics have been of a primary concern throughout the century, taking on different routes, in various fields. In aesthetics, Richard Woodfield explores how Max Dessoir's early twentieth century project to create an integrated aesthetics discipline disintegrated by the end of the century. In architecture, Alan Colquhoun explains that the changing conception of aesthetics that have taken place since the beginning of the modern movement in the early twentieth century has evolved around the problem of autonomy versus social engagement. Regarding politics, Lev Kreft argues that art and politics were not separated, autonomous fields of human activity in the twentieth century and that, on the contrary, political criteria for art has developed .

In the practice of art, there have been various attitudes to subvert the conventional role of the artist and numerous reasons underlying the changes in aesthetics in the twentieth century. S. M. Can Bilsel explores an alternative aesthetic that resists the totalising subject-position prescribed by the museum through the specific case of the Pergamon-Hall. Dionysis A. Zivas, through an overview of the historical experience of modern architecture in Greece, suggests that new materials and scales of construction in architecture have resulted in a shift in architectural aesthetics. Nina Danino emphasises the effects of feminist practice and new technology on the specific mediums of film and video, artists of which sought to challenge established politics of representation. Deborah Semel comments upon the changing role of the artist through changing models of arts education.

In addition to the other texts on the formation of the artist through shifting understandings of perception, infiltration of technology and the effects of education, in her provocatively titled essay "Ready-Made Avant-Garde," identifying and examining ready-made objects of the Third World, Jale Erzen recognises and initiates discussion on the value ascribed to the definition and role of the art object, perhaps, in my opinion, also insinuating the redundancy of the artist, but not art.

Although this book does not cover many of the twentieth century issues and concerns, it does reflect the variety of positions within the field of aesthetics and art. Moreover, to reiterate, this book is a born out of an apprehension at the dawn of the twenty-first century. As a final word, on behalf of SANART, I would like to thank all the participators, the distinguished speakers and the audience, for their whole hearted participation in the symposium and the gathering of the final material. I would also like to acknowledge thanks to Elvan Altan Ergut, Namık Erkal, Jale Nejdert Erzen, Güven Sargin and Chris Taylor for their much valuable proofreading assistance.