

The “German” Expressionism in Postmodern Discourse: Exhibitions, Art Criticism, and Contemporary Painting in France

The changes in the ideological significance of Expressionism over the course of the 20th century require an analysis of the institutional structures responsible for its political instrumentalization. The reception of this stylistic period simultaneously reflects and distorts German history. In the aftermath of the 1989/91 turning point, it became necessary to abandon obsolete meta-narratives that had served to legitimize outdated interpretations. The plurality of postmodern societies and intellectual configurations thus highlights the imperative for art historiography to subject itself to critical scrutiny.

Through an “expology” – a discursive and interpretive study of the exhibition as a medium – this dissertation aims to deconstruct the recent reception history of Expressionism. This foundational research relies on an extensive corpus of previously unpublished sources and interviews with contemporary witnesses.

Using a retro-perspective prism, spanning from the first exhibitions in France in the 1960s to those of the 2010s, four categorial axes reveal, in parallel dynamics, the modalities of reception: I. the external representation of the Federal Republic of Germany from a cultural diplomacy perspective; II. the approaches towards a transnational art historiography; III. the art system conceptualized according to its economic logic; IV. the reception history and artistic effects in French painting.

In their transversal dimension, the reception frameworks are reintegrated into the history of science and mentalities. Under the premises of art policy, a transnational European art history emerges, situated within institutions, exhibitions, and private collections, as well as in the history of stylistic cultural transfers.

Keywords

historiography; reception history; history of collections and institutions; history of science; history of styles; art criticism; museology; expography; expology; cultural transfer; art politics; painting; Expressionism; Fauvism; Neo-Expressionism; avant-garde; modernism; postmodernism; modern art; contemporary art; 20th century; 21st century; Germany; France; Europe; transnational