

## **CFP: The Avant-Gardes in the Nordic Countries 1925-1950: History, Culture and Aesthetics, 3-4 October 2013**

Some years ago the growing scholarly interest in avant-garde studies led to the formation of The Nordic Network of Avant-Garde Studies as a forum for attempts to map the cultural influence of the aesthetic avant-gardes in the Nordic countries (mainly Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden). Part of this project is the writing of a four volume *Cultural History of the Avant-Gardes in the Nordic Countries*. The first volume dealing with the years 1900-1925 will be published by Rodopi in spring 2013 (see attachment for a list of the around 30 contributions). The editors of this history now call for papers to a conference dealing with the history, culture, aesthetics, and politics of the avant-gardes in the Nordic countries in the period 1925-1950. Our hope is that most papers can be re-written and published as contributions to the second volume of the series, *A Cultural History of the Avant-Gardes in the Nordic Countries 1925-1950*.

### **The avant-gardes in the Nordic countries 1925-1950**

The years 1925-1950 represent decisive reformulations of the Nordic avant-gardes. While several representatives of the early avant-gardes became increasingly mainstream, new avant-garde movements such as surrealism were eventually introduced in the Nordic countries. The polarised political culture of the 1930s formed an important context and generated different responses to avant-garde aesthetics, and so did World War II. The end of this period has often been described as the end of the 'historical avant-gardes'. But at the end of the 1940s we also witness the emergence of new movements such as CoBrA, probably the first international avant-garde movement with a Scandinavian base. CoBrA's reformulation of avant-garde intentions had considerable effect on later international groups such as the situationists, and it marked the beginning of new avant-garde activities in the Nordic countries. During the same period, central aspects of Nordic modernity within design, welfare models and cultural politics ('Kulturradikalismen' e.g.) were developed in a complex process of assimilation and rejection of avant-garde impulses. The conference aims to deliver a broad survey of the many tensions, controversies, introductions, rejections and reformulations in this important phase in the history of the Nordic avant-gardes.

The frame of the conference is cross-aesthetic and transnational, focusing on avant-garde activities in the Nordic countries, as well as on the work of Nordic avant-garde artists working abroad and on the idea of the Nordic in the European avant-gardes. It includes aesthetic activities within, between and beyond the traditional arts (painting, literature, theatre, film, photography, music, dance, architecture). Contributions may focus on individual activities, arts, artists and works and genres – but preferably in a perspective involving broader historical, cultural, political and aesthetic contexts. Regarded within a national framework, avant-garde enterprises often seem isolated, sporadic and fragmentary. That is why the transnational perspective stresses connections between local, national, Nordic and international manifestations of the avant-gardes.

The papers should present case studies rather than encyclopaedic elaborations, i.e. instructive examples introducing new perspectives on phenomena which condense important currents, tensions and controversies. They should reflect the topics dealt with *as* avant-garde

(and not e.g. as modernism) and may even discuss different aspects of the concept of “avant-garde” or “anti-avant-garde”. The purpose of the conference is to discuss the avant-garde not as a predefined theoretical concept but as a crucial perspective on aesthetic and cultural history.

### **Culture, history and aesthetics of the avant-gardes: aspects and dimensions**

The panels of the seminar include such themes, aspects and dimensions as:

- The fate and legacy of the earlier avant-gardes.
- New movements introduced in the Nordic countries: surrealism (the Halmstad group, Freddie, Linien etc.), constructivism, CoBrA etc. Specific Nordic constellations such as 'Formal abstraktion' or the Icelandic Septem group.
- Aesthetic, cultural and political practices of the avant-gardes.
- Places and media of the avant-garde including its market, the role of museums, exhibitions, magazines and publishing houses, the negotiation of avant-garde impulses in the applied arts as well as the role of technology and popular culture.
- Transnational contacts, transmissions and translations. Networks, international topography, travels, exiled artists like Schwitters staying in Norway. Negotiations of avant-garde impulses by individual artists and works.
- Politics: the experience of the war, of fascism, Stalinism and totalitarianism, the social visions and utopias of the avant-garde (from the Stockholm exhibition in 1930 to the revolutionary inclinations of CoBrA).
- Discursive and ideological contexts, nationalism, sexual politics etc. Nordic configurations such as 'Kulturradikalismen'.
- Responses to the avant-garde, assimilations, rejections, legacy and cultural effects. From Icelandic exhibitions on degenerate art to the assimilation of avant-garde impulses in Swedish welfare technology (and in Swedish literary modernism)

The themes specified here are meant as provisional suggestions. The organising committee invites participants to suggest other topics and individual cases.

### **Practical information and deadline for application**

The conference will take place at Copenhagen University from 3-5 October.

During these days we plan to present and discuss around 30 papers. Each paper will have 20 minutes of presentation followed by 10 minutes discussion, i.e. 3 papers in a 1½ hour session.

The conference fee will be 1000 DKK, covering coffee/tea, lunches and a conference dinner.

We will help you book a hotel room if you wish and will provide further information about local travel, location and other practical details.

Arrival and departure: The conference will start by midday Thursday 3 October and end by midday Saturday 5 October, so conference participants can arrive in Copenhagen Thursday morning and depart Saturday afternoon.

### **Application and suggestions for papers**

The conference language is English.

All participants should submit a title and a 2-300 word abstract before 2 April 2013. Abstracts should be sent to [avantgarde@hum.ku.dk](mailto:avantgarde@hum.ku.dk).