The Limit of the Object
Contemporary Art & Lacanian Psychoanalysis

The idea behind this event, to be held on the 9th of March 2013, and initiated by the Irish Circle of the Lacanian Orientation-New Lacanian School (ICLO-NLS) in collaboration with the MA Art in the Contemporary World-National College of Art & Design (NCAD), is to bring together artists and psychoanalysts of the Lacanian orientation in order to engage in a dialogue on the importance of contemporary art, with particular emphasis on the notion of the ‘object’ and its ‘limits’.

The premise on which this event is based concerns a limit, in relation to which analysts know that the artist is always ahead of them. Freud compared suggestive techniques used in the treatments of mental problems to the act of painting which adds and adjusts layers of paint, whilst, on the contrary, he compared the analytic act to sculpture in the sense of stripping the object of layers of material in order to arrive at a beautiful or meaningful form. This gives rise to the question whether these metaphors still apply in modern society and for contemporary art.

If we consider art to be an object, it is the kind of object that has an effect on the speaking-being, the question is: what kind of object is it? Art as an object affects the speaking-being by virtue of the fact that it is intimately connected to what Lacan calls the object a. Going beyond Freud, Lacan added to the series of libidinal objects the voice and the gaze. These two objects are crucial in the exploration of the functioning of art work.

Lacan argued that the function of painting concerns the tempering of desire. One of the issues to be explored is whether this is still the case. In other words, is the effect of contemporary art not exactly the opposite from the tempering of desire? Or is it not the case that contemporary art has broken through the limits of what is beautiful in order to have an effect on – or expose – something else? That what is beautiful, Lacan says, is not unrelated to the form of the human body (what gives body provides shape, something that is of similar nature as to what is beautiful). This something else Lacan called the Real, and it evokes the limits of the Symbolic and the Imaginary.

If contemporary art has an effect on the speaking-being, on the real of the body, perhaps this is an effect that takes place by breaking-through the barriers of what is beautiful. One could say that contemporary art wakes the viewer up out of the slumber of meaning and beauty. In this precise sense the artist has preceded the analyst, i.e., yet again, the artist has shown the analyst the way by waking up the subject, because surely that is crucial in times when the subject has fallen asleep when immediate satisfaction, consumption, etc., are being prioritized.

Also, if contemporary art creates holes in the textures of what is beautiful, wholesome and meaningful, by aiming at the real, can it be posed that contemporary art is essentially ironic in nature? The ironic style is not without a relationship to madness, as J.-A. Miller suggested. This has implications for the viewer of art and the artist him or herself.

These are some of themes and questions we would like to explore and debate at this event.

Rik Loose
Organising Committee

Ibid., p. 140.

Programme

10.00 Registration
10.30 Welcome by Florencia F.C. Shanahan - Chair of ICLO
10.45 Vincent Dachy: “Vibrant Decoy” / Chair: Alan Rowan
11.00 Rik Loose: “Introduction to Lacan & Contemporary Art / Chair: Lorna Kernan
11.30 Vincent Dachy: “Some Remarks on the Contemporary Contemporaneity of Arts and Psychoanalysis” & discussion / Chair: Claire Hawkes
12.00 Coffee break
12.30 Suzanne Walsh: “BecomingBird” - Dialogue with Declan Long
12.50 Suzanne Walsh: “Lines of Drift” - Dialogue with Declan Long
13.10 Declan Long: “Representational Limit / Constitutive Lack: Psychoanalysis & the political in contemporary art” & discussion / Chair: Rik Loose
13.30 Panel Discussion / Chair: Dr Medb Ruane

Organised by The Irish Circle of the Lacanian Orientation - NLS
in collaboration with the
MA Art in the Contemporary World
National College of Art & Design