

Critical Machines

AUB Byblos Bank Art Gallery, Beirut

Artists in the Exhibition

Art & Language, Burak Arikan, Free art collective, Janah Hilwé, Khalil Rabah, Vadim Zakharov

A **Bookshelf** with critical machines by: André Breton, Critical Art Ensemble, Marcel Duchamp, Andrea Fraser, Heresies Collective, William Hogarth, György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay (Artpool), Kenneth Goldsmith, Hans Haacke & Pierre Bourdieu, Pablo Helguera, Garnet Hertz, Wassily Kandinsky, Allan Kaprow, Hassan Khan, Andrei Monastyrsky, William Morris, Walid Raad, Ad Reinhardt, Temporary Services, Gregory Sholette, Nasrin Tabatabai and Babak Afrassiabi and others.

Curatorial Statement

In the language of contemporary labor processes and manufacturing equipment, a “critical machine” is a piece of equipment designated and programmed to monitor and report on other machines in the production chain. Critical machines are deployed as preventive maintenance measures to guard against equipment malfunctioning and the disruption of the production flow. The main goal of the critical machine is to inform the human operator about urgently required systemic adjustments.

We apply this machinic analogy to the world of contemporary art as a central motif, even a provocation, that might unsettle certain assumptions about the modes of production and the circulation of art today. Within the broader scheme of things, *Critical Machines* is about Critique. It is about a specifically modern attitude, which relies heavily on rationality and reason, enjoys questioning authority and accepted practices and seeks to determine – as Immanuel Kant did consecutively with his logical machines, the three Critiques – the conditions of possibility under which we may learn what we can know, what we ought to do, and what we may hope.

Critical Machines is divided into two parts. For the exhibition, we have invited six artists and artist groups to display their proposals for critical machines. Here, forms of critique are imbedded in sensuous or objective form. For this project, however, and drawing on the metaphor of the critical machine, we invite artists whose work addresses, represents, negates or critiques not the world at large (as artists have done for centuries) but art itself, its tenets and histories, or what is today often called the “art worlds.” Some of the critical machines produced for this exhibition perform tasks that once fell solely within the field of expertise of art historians, critics, museum curators or aestheticians. The six projects on display are: **Art & Language’s** *Homes from Homes II, Diagram (ii)*; **Burak Arikan’s** *Artist Collector Network*; **Free art collective’s** *Political Art Today*; **Khalil Rabah’s** *Two Exhibitions*; **Janah Hilwé’s** *Poster for the Exhibition “Critical Machines”*; and **Vadim Zakharov’s** *Moscow Conceptualism presented by Vadim Zakharov*.

In addition, the visitor will find in the exhibition a Bookshelf that sets on display multiple instances of critical machines assembled by artists from different epochs and regions, compiled by the curator of the exhibition: from William Hogarth’s *Analysis of Beauty* (1753) to Wassily Kandinsky’s *Point and Line to Plane* (1926) and, within the

Lebanese context, from Georges D. Corm's *Essai sur l'art et la civilisation de ce temps* (1966) to Walid Raad's *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow. A History of Art in the Arab World* (2011). The shelf hosts approximately one hundred books, magazines and printed and bound content from various websites, all edited, made or published by artists. These publications present a wide array of artistic methods and devices: from institutional critique to art historiography and archival research, and from various forms of political activism and artistic subversion to aesthetic and art critical speculations. All of these critical machines, which we purchased, requested from artists worldwide, or unearthed from various layers of the Web, will be offered to the AUB library after the completion of this project.

The second part of the event is an international conference titled *Critical Machines: Art Periodicals Today* (March 7-8, 2014). We have summoned editors of local, regional and global art periodicals, inviting them to speak about their publications and the various agendas that inform and motivate their editorial efforts. We are encouraging our guests to reflect upon the tasks that their periodicals fulfil today. It must be said that the distinction that we draw between critical machines assembled by artists (the exhibition) and critical machines constructed by editors/critics (the conference) is an arbitrary one, as many editors are full-time practicing artists and some artists in the exhibition are also editors. However, we hope that the structure of the *Critical Machines* event might help bring into discussion this and many other distinctions and questions related to modes and strategies of critique, as well as talk about the roles that art periodicals play today within both their immediate and distant contexts.

Octavian Esanu
Curator AUB Art Galleries