16. | Minimalism is capitalist





2006, easels,painting, sentence, circular saw, posters, neon light, size may vary.
Exhibition view of Unexpected - Unerwartet, Kunstmuseum Bochum, 2010, Bochum.
Courtesy of the artist and Ceysson & Bénétière, Paris.
Ed. of 1 + 1 A.P.

Installation en développement, le minimalisme capitaliste s'articule autour d'un double questionnement : celui du lien entre religion et image, celui des liens, des connexions, des relations entre mouvement artistique et idéologie politique.

Une réflexion sur l'image - Tableau presque monochrome, chevalet sans tableau : il n'y a, comme on le dit du minimalisme, « rien » à voir et pourtant le problème du sens de l'image, en sa dimension sacrée, est posé : la partie centrale du chevalet, d'un rouge vif tranchant sur le blanc sur blanc du reste de l'installation, évoque à la fois un motif récurrent des différents mouvements conceptuels du 20ème siècle –du suprématisme au constructivisme, du Bauhaus à De Stilj, du minimalisme à l'art conceptuel- et la croix chrétienne, image canonique dans l'histoire de l'art occidental.
C'est ce même chevalet , celui de Matisse, de Delacroix, qui, introduit dans l'Orient colonisé, détourne l'artiste arabe de l'ornementation, et le pousse à singer pour un temps les esthétiques orientalisantes et les grands moments de l'histoire de l'art occidental, remettant en question par ce biais son rapport à l'image et à la représentation figurée comme imitation de la création divine, réinitialisant celle de l'image non-figurée.
C'est ce même chevalet que le constructivisme, dès les années 20, entend supprimer et que le minimalisme américain achèvera de dissoudre.

Question des liens entre mouvement artistique et idéologie politique- Le « minimalisme capitaliste » : un oxymore ? Ici, mounir fatmi fait explicitement référence au minimalisme américain, né dans les années 60, en réaction à

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Considering the image – "The picture is almost monochromatic." "There is no image on the canvas." "There is 'nothing to see'." These are comments frequently heard about minimalist art, and yet, the "meaning" of the image is still questioned. In Minimalism is Capitalist the central part of an easel is painted in a bright red that contrasts with the "white on white" of the rest of the installation. This work suggests a recurrent motif throughout the major art movements in the 20th Century- from Suprematism to Constructivism, Bauhaus to De Stijl, Minimalism to Conceptualism, as well as to the Christian cross, the canonical image in western art history. It was this same easel (whether of Matisse or Delacroix) that was introduced in the colonized East, steering Arab artists away from the ornamental style and encouraging them, for a moment, to copy the figurative styles of oriental and occidental art history. Through this encounter these artists began to question their relationship to the image, eventually rejecting the use of the figure as an imitation of the divine, and began once again, to use non-representational imagery in their work. It is this easel that the Russian Constructivists in the 1920's, were compelled to remove and which the American Minimalist movement in the 1960's would finally disintegrate.

Questioning the links between an artistic movement and a political ideology – Is Minimalism is Capitalist an oxymoron? Perhaps. With this phrase Mounir Fatmi specifically refers to

l'Expressionnisme abstrait et surtout au Pop art, interprété comme quintessence du triomphe et de la frénésie de la société de consommation capitaliste et de l' american way of life. Car si Frank Stella, Donald Judd ou Carl Andre ont pu faire leur le principe du « less is more », c'est bien qu'il existe entre l'architecte allemand Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, pape de l'architecture dans le Chicago des années 40, à qui l'on prête (à tort) la paternité de cette maxime, le Bauhaus dont il est issu, et le constructivisme russe, des connexions politiques tout autant qu'esthétiques.
Si l'Histoire est, en un sens, « géographie dynamique », « plateau rizhomatique » (Deleuze) alors celle-ci , lorsqu'elle contraint les artistes du Bauhaus à fuir l'Allemagne Nazie pour les Etats-Unis, entraînant avec eux ses racines, Malevitch, Rodtchenko - soutiens picturaux de la Révolution russe- court-circuite les préjugés historiques.
Ou comment bien des gratte-ciels de Chicago ou de New-York, symboles triomphants du capitalisme, comme les premiers plans de Le Corbusier doivent beaucoup au constructivisme russe. Et comment Dan Flavin, en pleine guerre froide, construit une œuvre en hommage constant à Vladimir Tatline*.

Le manifeste du Bauhaus annonce : « Le but final de toute activité plastique est la construction » Cette construction que mounir fatmi entend, d'oeuvre en œuvre, déconstruire.

Marie Deparis

*Vladimir Tatline (1885 - 1953- Moscou) dont l'œuvre la plus célèbre fut son projet pour un Monument à la Troisième Internationale, datant de 1919-1920, qui aurait servi à abriter les quartiers généraux du Komintern (Internationale Communiste) mais ne sera jamais réalisée. Ce projet constitue l'œuvre la plus emblématique du Constructivisme.

American Minimalism, a movement born in the 1960's in reaction to Abstract Expressionism, and particularly to Pop Art, an aesthetic considered to be the epitome of the frenzied capitalist consumer society and the "American way of life." Minimalist artists such as Frank Stella, Donald Judd or Carl Andre, who appropriated the « less-is-more » theory as a rule, were influenced by and indeed connected to the political and aesthetic concerns of the German architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, former director of the Bauhaus since 1930 and based in Chicago in the 1940's and who was often (incorrectly) associated to the "less-is-more" maxim, as well as to the Russian Constructivists.
History forced many Bauhaus artists to flee from Nazi Germany to the United States bringing with them their roots of Malevitch and Rodchenko, the artistic supports of the Russian Revolution. Through such events, history can be understood like a "dynamic geography", a "rhizome of plateaus" (Deleuze), a short-circuit of the historical prejudices. These personal migrations, and with them, their ideas, are why many skyscrapers in Chicago or New York, the triumphant symbols of the capitalism, as well as the early concepts of Le Corbusier, are descendent from ideas of Russian Constructivism. This is also why Dan Flavin in the middle of cold war in America made a sculpture in tribute to Vladimir Tatlin.

The Bauhaus manifesto said: "the ultimate aim of all creative activity is building." But for Mounir Fatmi, it is the idea, and it is precisely this notion of "building" that he proposes to deconstruct in the installation Minimalism is Capitalist, piece by piece.

Translation: Caroline Rossiter.

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Marie Deparis, 2007

exhibitions:

2010

Unexpected - Unerwartet - Kunstmuseum Bochum - Expo collective

2009

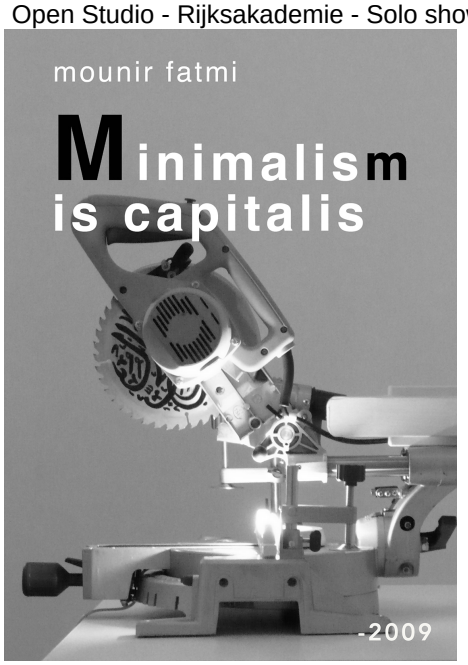
Minimalism is capitalist - Galerie Conrads - Solo show

2007

In search of paradise - Ferdinand van Dieten Gallery - Solo show

2006

Open Studio - Rijksakademie - Solo show



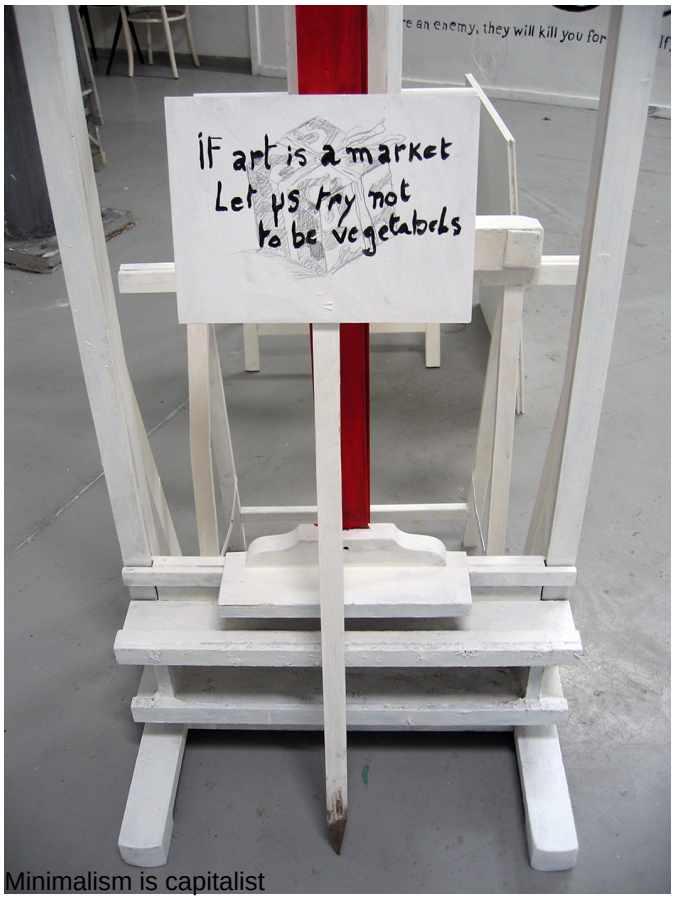
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mounir fatmi: Minimalism is Capitalism

DÜSSELDORF
GALERIE CONRADS

UTA M. REIDL

mounir fatmi once referred to himself as a «white man in Africa and a potential terrorist in all western airports». The 39 year-old artist was born in Tangiers, and now lives and works in this Moroccan city and in Paris. Due to his Arab origin, he feels obliged to maintain a political commitment, so, during the Venice Biennial in 2007, he decided that, from then on, his name would be spelt without capital letters, in order to protect his identity. At the Biennial he presented *Save Manhattan 03*, an intensely urban sound piece in which he used speakers in a range of sizes and colours to create a shadow on the wall, reminding viewers of the classic outline of the island of Manhattan prior to 9/11. Along with this piece, visitors were able to enjoy a similar installation, made with books about Islam and terrorism.

In another exhibition in Amsterdam, the artist wrote on the wall: «If you are an enemy, they will kill you for money; if you are a friend, they will kill you for free.» With these stark references in mind, fatmi's current exhibition at Düsseldorf's Gallery Conrads seems at first to be a peaceful space for oriental aesthetics and existential reflexion: the black-and-white mural of a skull, entitled *Hard Head*, covered with arabesques, in which six Arab numbers refer to several of the functions of the brain. The serpentine line from a Koran sura within the ornaments asks the question: «Do those who know resemble those who do not?» Later on, we come across the piece *The Monuments*, which is made up of five hard hats made out of porcelain, which have been arranged in a row, and engraved with the names of the French philosophers Deleuze, Foucault, Baudrillard, Derrida and Guattari. It is worth noting the way this group of pieces conveys a somewhat ironic reference to the relationship established between physical and philosophical work. However, other pieces reveal the political and almost cynical dimension of the show, as is the case of *Minimalism is Capitalism*, an installation made up of circular saw blades in which fragments of the suras from the Koran have been engraved.

This fascinating juxtaposition of form and content is an interpretation of the cultural clash which took place following 9/11; as the artist rightly points out, «before 9/11, the Koran had always been associated with a very exotic literary work. After 9/11, it has become a political weapon.»

The installation is rounded off with another sculptural piece, made up of white easels, among which stand out a red cross and two canvases on which are written the «If art is a market, let's try not to be vegetables» and «Fuck supremacist socialist glory and prosperity for minimalist capitalism.» This immediately reminds us of the importance of the faith of Christianity in modernity, and conveys the main aim of this artist, namely to visualise and reflect the process of deconstruction which characterises modernity.

Using mostly poor materials, mounir fatmi builds these minimalistic settings, which can obviously be highly symbolical. Thus, the *Hard Head* described above is linked to the helmets representing philosophers in *The Monuments* by bundles of cables reminiscent of the nervous system in a human body.

Another juxtaposition of political references and the history of art is expressed by the artist with the digital print The Dynamic Geography of History (2009), which displays three statements that are to be read as equations requiring no further comment: "minimalism is capitalist", "constructivism is socialist" and "futurism is fascism".