

Hassan Khan, Guest Curator 2015 in conversation with Gabriel Flückiger

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«*We want to shift gears*»

This year's guest curator of the *Sommerakademie im Zentrum Paul Klee* artist, musician and writer Hassan Khan comes from Cairo, but rather than stressing any cultural specificity he questions such preconceptions. A talk about his intentions during the academy.

Gabriel Flückiger: The Sommerakademie is very international, not only the fellows but also the invited guest curators come from all over the world. Does your domicile Cairo matter in the way you programme the Sommerakademie?

Hassan Khan: Where I come from has no direct bearing to what I am doing in the *Sommerakademie*. I find it strange that you make such an implicit assumption and link your issue to a place rather an approach.. I am more interested in discussing ideas, and propositions than backgrounds and identities.

But don't you think that the global art system has also become more and more homogeneous and a link to certain local specificities in terms of a strategic essentialism is a possible mean against this?

Although the art system is largely homogeneous, difference is introduced through the language of each individual artist. Artists develop their own obsessions, formal propositions, inquiries and languages even if they are also of course connected to a shared sense of what art is. Even in totalizing systems people are always introducing variations and resistance through practice. On the other hand, this art system itself cannot survive without assimilating these changes and differences, this is part of how a dominant system works.

So it's also problematic to think of an outside or of being against something as such thoughts are integrated into the system and keep it going?

Yes, it is intellectually dishonest, except in very rare and exceptional cases. Ironically one finds that claims of 'outsider' status are, in many instances, used to lubricate the gears of the system. This doesn't mean that we have to think of ourselves as slaves to the system, we just have to acknowledge where we stand and decide how we want to deal with it. That is, for me, already a form of political consciousness. If we want to take another direction and step out of this system than we have to really step out, and produce alternatives but I am not sure if artists are the best people to do this, we're not systems or structures.



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Having these thoughts in the back of our minds, how do you conceive this year's edition of the Sommerakademie? How do you want to work with this format?

My first intuitive response to the invitation was that I didn't want to come up with a totalizing theme, but rather to develop an approach. I want to engage with the fellows directly through what the various (very diverse) guests would bring to the table. Rather than foreground one big statement that we all have to respond with, let's focus on what working with different approaches can potentially allow. For example in my most recent teaching experience at the Städelschule the approach was to completely focus on what the students were doing. With that focus as a starting point you can discover other, sometimes surprising directions. I like to take the diversity of how people work and their positions and understandings and to use that as part of the situation you're in.

Your description of the Sommerakademie is rather open and doesn't give clear hints of what's to come – it rather raises questions.

The title 'Teaser' doesn't offer a statement, it offers a possible relationship, a relationship between myself, the academy, the fellows and the wider public, between the different stuff we are working with. There will be at least three public manifestations of the academy which I find of equal significance to what happens behind closed doors. My main focus is how to make this as rich, profound, challenging, engaging for the fellows as possible, this is my central motivation.

I am interesting in finding a framework where we can question presumptions. That's why questions play a central role in my teaser: What is an artist, what is an context, what is value, what kind of relationship do we want to what surrounds us? Also, the invited lecturers – so far Tirdad Zolghadr, Bassam El Baroni, Uriel Barthélémi are confirmed – all have highly individual approaches to what they do, their work in various ways question the generic and the assumed. But that, I would argue, is not enough, it is also the ability to find formal translations to these questions that makes such figures important for me, and hopefully productive in the context of the Academy.

So you conceive the Sommerakademie as a place where you want to circumvent or reformulate established ways of speaking about art and also question existing formats or procedures?

Yes, we really want to shift gears. That is why it is valuable for the academy that each invited guest functions in such a different way. To establish different ways of communication and procedures is the potential of the *Sommerakademie* but in the end we have to remember that it's a only a ten day event, you can have an interesting experience in those days and open up certain horizons but you can't do much more than that. I also don't want to claim more than what I think a format like that can offer.