“Magiciens de la terre” (1989)
Jean-Hubert Martin
November 22nd 2010, 19 h
MACBA Auditorium

“Magiciens de la terre”
Musée national d’art moderne Centre Georges Pompidou and Grande Halle de La Villette, Paris
May 18th – August 14th, 1989
Curator: Jean-Hubert Martin
Exhibition maps

a. Musée national d'art moderne Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

**IL - visiteur qui cherche le sens?**
- joue à revenir sur ses pas.

Alain Lugue

1. C'est habiter le lieu.
2. C'est porter partout de certaines guêpières.
3. C'est parcourir le lieu déjà habité, qui on a le pouvoir?
4. C'est que la guêpière ne s'alimente pas du seul.
5. Quelle chance! Pourquoi?
6. On l'aime mieux pour manger?
7. Y a-t-il que sa pensée?
8. Y a-t-il que son verre?
9. Y a-t-il que son œil?
10. Y a-t-il que son œil?
11. Y a-t-il que son œil?
12. Y a-t-il que son œil?
13. Y a-t-il que son œil?
14. Y a-t-il que son œil?
15. Y a-t-il que son œil?
b. Grande Halle de La Villette, Paris

**A few statements on “Magiciens de la terre”**

1.

“Jean-Hubert Martin, the Director of the Georges Pompidou Centre and the Commissioner of the exhibition, in his statement of 1986 describes the exhibition as comprising the following sections:

1. Artists from the artistic centres: A representative selection of art today, showing the mature artists of the last twenty years most committed to the avant-garde; artists with links to non-European cultures.

- African and Asian artists living in the West whose work reveals elements of their own cultural roots. Western artists whose work shows a concern for cultures other than their own.

2. Artists who do not belong to these centres but to the ‘peripheries’.

- Works of an archaic nature intended for ceremonies and rituals, linked to transcendental religious experience or magic...

- Traditional works showing an assimilation of external influences (…)

- Works from the artists’ imagination, sometimes marginal, reinventing or re-discovering a cosmogony or interpretation of the world.

- Works of artists who have been trained in Western or Westernised art schools.”

Rasheed Araeen, “Our Bauhaus, others’ mudhouse”, *Third text. Third World perspectives on contemporary art and culture* (London), no. 6, Spring 1989, pp. 3-14 (pp. 8-9).

2.

"Unlike a mere collection of objects, the exhibition gathers durable or epheremal works -- objects--, produced by authors not only clearly identified, but whom we have even visited at home. All these objects, from here and elsewhere, have in common that they have an aura. These are not mere objects or tools for practical and material use. They are intended to act on the mind and on the ideas of which they are products. They are containers of metaphysical values. They communicate a sense. “

3. “Martin: A criticism that was immediately expressed about this exhibition project concerns the supposed problem of decontextualization and the betrayal of other cultures. Yes, the objects in our exhibition will be displaced from their functional context, and they will be shown in a museum and another exhibition space in Paris. But we will display them in a manner that has never been used for objects from the Third World. That is, for the most part, the makers of these objects will be present, and I will avoid showing finished, movable objects as much as possible. I will favor ‘installations’ (...) made by the artists specifically for this particular occasion. (...) I know that is dangerous to extricate cultural objects from other civilizations. But we can also learn from these civilizations, which --just like ours-- are engaged in a search for spirituality.”

(...) “What is especially important to recognize is that this will be the first truly international exhibition of worldwide contemporary art.”


4. “Magiciens de la Terre is indeed a grand spectacle with a lot of fascination for the exotic. There is nothing wrong with a grand spectacle, but if it ignores of undermines issues of a historical and epistemological nature then we must not be bogged down by the excitement and fascination it has produced. However, exoticism is not necessarily inherent in the works themselves. It is in their decontextualisation, not only in the shift from one culture to another (which is inevitable), but more importantly, in the displacement from one paradigm to another; this has emptied them of their meanings, leaving only what Frederic Jameson calls a ‘play of surfaces’ to dazzle the (dominant) eye.”

(...) “However, Magiciens de la Terre is an extremely important exhibition. Not only for its physical scale --one hundred ‘artists’ from all over the world in an exhibition occupying both the top floor of the Georges Pompidou Centre and the Grand Hall of La Villette-- but also for its global ambition; not only for its claim to represent many different cultures but also for its presumed intention to question those cultural distinctions which have divided the world.”

Rasheed Araeen, “Our Bauhaus, others’ mudhouse”, *Third text. Third World perspectives on contemporary art and culture* (London), no. 6, Spring 1989, pp. 3-14 (pp. 4-5 & 8).
5.

“I will say that Magiciens in a way opened up a space for really articulating the relationship between the works made in the West and non-West.”


Jean-Hubert Martin was born in Strasbourg in 1944. From 1971 to 1982 he was curator of the Musée national d’art moderne (Paris), which in 1977 became the Centre Georges Pompidou. There he curated, among many other exhibitions, a major retrospective of Francis Picabia (1976), two major exhibitions of the work of Man Ray (1972 and 1982), a retrospective of Kasimir Malewitsch (1978), and the exhibition series “Paris-Berlin” (1978) and “Paris-Moscow” (1979). Between 1982 and 1985 he directed the Kunsthalle Bern, where he took special interest in discovering and showing young artists, such as the ones included in the exhibition “Konstruirte Orte” (1983). He also curated the first individual exhibition of Ilya Kabakov in the Western World. In 1987 he returned as director to the Musée national d’art moderne (Paris), where he presented “Magiciens de la terre” (1989). In 1991 Jean-Hubert
Martin was appointed artistic director of the Chateau d'Oiron. In 1994 he became director of the Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie (Paris). In 2000 he was artistic Director of the Biennale de Lyon. From 2000 to 2006 Jean-Hubert Martin was general director of the museum kunst palast foundation (Düsseldorf). He works currently as freelance curator.

For a complete bibliography of his writings:
http://www.archivesdelacritiquedart.org/outils_documentaires/critiques_d_art/327/bibliographie

Selected bibliography


Araeen, Rasheed: “Our Bauhaus, others' mudhouse", in: Third text. Third World perspectives on contemporary art and culture (London), no. 6, spring 1989, pp. 3-14


Dubow, Neville: "Magicians of the earth", *ADA: art, design, architecture* (Cape Town), no. 8, 1990, pp. 6-7.


Greenberg, Reesa; Ferguson, Bruce and Nairne, Sandy: *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London: Routledge, 1996.


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1 Original text: “Contrairement à une simple collecte d’objets, l’exposition réunit des œuvres – des objets – durables ou éphémères réalisés par des auteurs non seulement clairement identifiés mais auxquels nous avons rendu visite à domicile. Tous ces objets, d’ici ou d’ailleurs, ont en commun d’avoir une aura. Ce ne sont pas de simples objets ou outils à usage fonctionnel et matériel. Ils sont destinés à agir sur le mental et les idées dont ils sont le fruit. Ils sont les réceptacles de valeurs métaphysiques. Ils communiquent un sens.” (translation by MG)

Compiled by Karin Jaschke