

Ars Contemporaneous Alpinus
Collection CAE1609

Introduction/Abstract

Ars contemporaneous alpinus (ACA) was a theoretical and applied research project about the issue of site-specific practices taking the natural environment as a context. Based on the Valais, Switzerland, as a case-study and laboratory, ACA sought to contextualize this phenomenon, and to provide it with a critical reading. Materials include video, photographs, essays, maps, posters, other printed ephemera.

Biographical Note: Benoît Antille

Benoît Antille. (born in Switzerland) graduated from the MA Program in Classical Archeology and Art History at the Fribourg University (Switzerland, 2001) and from the Curatorial Practice MA Program at the California College of the Arts in San Francisco (2011). He is currently president of the MAXXX – Project Space association, researcher for the Ecole cantonale d'art du Valais, and coordinator of the artists-in-residence program at Villa Ruffieux in Sierre. Between 2003 and 2009, he worked as curator and coordinator of the residency program at the Cultural Center Ferme-Asile, in Sion. In 2012, he did the Sandretto Re Rebaudengo residency program for curators, before being contracted by the Culture Department of the Valais to write a report on the situation of contemporary art in this region – Art Pro – in anticipation of their revision of the criteria for public funding.

Scope and Content

Realized between September 2013 and February 2015, Ars contemporaneous alpinus (ACA) was a theoretical and applied research project about the issue of site-specific practices taking the natural environment as a context. ACA addresses the phenomenon of sculpture parks as they are implemented in rural areas, with a focus upon site-specific approaches and curatorial strategy as an artistic practice. The organization of site-specific projects in the natural environment has become a kind of trend in many peripheral regions over the world. Often realized through public funding, these commissioned projects respond to the agenda of local cultural policies, whose primary aim can be to enhance a site with touristic attractiveness. As a consequence of the urbanization phenomenon that characterizes the region of Valais – located in the heart of the Swiss Alps – an increasing amount of outdoor, site-specific projects have been developed there over the last several years. Local politicians noticed this trend and saw it as the auspicious emergence of a new regional particularism that will hopefully add cultural surplus value to the region. Questions addressed included: Are these projects still able to produce a critical discourse escaping the normative effects of a service economy instrumentalized by local policies? If yes, what kind of projects can be developed in this context? To which strategies should artists employ to avoid instrumentalization? And ultimately, how does site-specific art inform us about the relationship between contemporary society and the countryside, the land or the landscape?

Based on the Valais as a case-study and laboratory, ACA sought to contextualize this phenomenon, and to provide it with a critical reading. ACA relied on field studies in Switzerland, France, England, United States, and Morocco. These trips led to the decision to focus on two cases for a comparative analysis with the Valais: Grizedale Arts, in the Lake District of the UK, and the Centre international d'art et du paysage de Vassivière in France. The analysis addressed links between contemporary art and regional policies, as well as the stakes of the particular activity of art commissioning. The material gathered together during the field study constitutes a film archive of documented art projects and a series of interviews. These trips also introduced the Valais into an international network of artists, curators or researchers— some of whom were invited to take part in a

research week in this county. This week concluded with a two-day seminar, held on September 18th and 19th 2014 at the Château Mercier in Sierre. The videos of the interviews and of the seminar are available online: <http://www.ecav.ch/en/projects/rad-projects/ars-contemporaneus-alpinus-304>

Four artists – Jérôme Leuba (CH), Frauke Materlik (DE), Ricardo Rivera (US) and Natsuko Uchino (JP) – were invited to realize projects taking as a context the Valais as much as the research project itself. These artists were asked to reflect on the various topics addresses by ACA: such as site-specificity, regional policies and the activity of art commissioning. Their projects will be shown in various exhibitions and are available online. ACA is a research project of the Ecole cantonale d'art du Valais (ECAV), financed by HES-SO and the fonds pour les projets régionaux Valaisans.

Materials include video, photographs, essays, maps, posters, other printed ephemera.

This archive is currently in process.