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TRAUMA: CONTEMPORARY ART AND ARCHITECTURE RESPONSES TO THE REFUGEE CRISIS

Abstract:

Trauma Theory and Refugee Studies are distinctive interdisciplinary fields in contemporary criticism since the 1980s. They explore interfaces between situations of extreme socio-political stress and efforts to address or ameliorate these through interventions from a wide range of areas. This paper investigates recent responses from the visual arts and architecture to the trauma of the current refugee crisis. It posits the notion of homo sacer, explained by Giorgio Agamben (*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* 1998) as people who find themselves living outside the law. In response to the plight of homo sacer in the light of current border mentalities, the visual arts work with re-presentation and re-imagination as categories of practice; while re-construction and re-configuration in architecture are categories of current 'forensic' efforts focused on the plight of the displaced. Artists and architects have made manifest their concern for homo sacer through a wide range of strategies deployed within these categories. This paper aims to bring these strategies together within a system attesting to the creative ingenuity around trauma and displacement within the areas of the visual arts and architecture in our time. Recent visual texts presented range from Hito Steyerl's video figures in *How Not to be Seen* (2013) to stills from the film *Les Sauteurs* (*Those Who Jump* by Sidibé, Siebert and Wagner 2016) to the use of unconventional construction materials and designs by Shigeru Ban and Abeer Seikaly in various locations of recent trauma. This paper argues that art and architecture do make the world a better place through imaginative interventions and a refusal to allow the unquestioned normalization of border mentalities.

Keywords:

Trauma, Refugees, Art, Architecture, Forensics, Creative Ingenuity

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