



Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung
für Kultur und Medien



CENTRO
TEDESCO
DI STUDI
VENEZIANI

BRIDGES – ENCOUNTERS

Monday, 29th October 2018, 5 pm, Palazzo Barbarigo della Terrazza, Venice

Lecture by prof. Michael Diers

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"Aesthetics of Provocation - About Art and Politics in New York and Venice" (Abstract)

Iconoclasm is, etymologically and historically speaking, a form of vandalism directed against images, statues, and architectural monuments. Ideological conflicts of a religious, theological, or political nature have generally led to—and continue to inspire—such acts of destruction, that is the intentional effacement of cultural objects. Although the first few decades following World War II allowed us to assume (or at least hope) that such atavistic acts of hostility against images were once and for all a thing of the past, recent history has provided many lessons and experiences to the contrary. Iconoclasm assumes many forms. Prominent examples dating from some twenty-five years ago include attacks against the imagery of fallen and disgraced communist regimes in Eastern Europe—attacks often supported by the government. To a greater and more serious extent, however, the destruction of monuments and deadly terrorist attacks perpetrated by Islamist groups have once again given currency to iconoclasm and vandalism, returning them the political arena with heightened urgency (and a sense of alarm).

It is important to consider this overarching political climate when exploring a number of street-based actions of the present and recent past, which have been labeled as acts of iconoclasm and vandalism. My interest of research focuses on selected interventions by the artist groups Gelitin (Austria, founded in 1993), Chto Delat (St. Petersburg, founded in 2003), Pussy Riot (Russia, founded in 2011), Voina (Russia, founded in 2005), Wermke/Leinkauf (Germany, founded in 2007), Zentrum für Politische Schönheit (Germany, founded in 2008) and different so called controversial installations of artists like Sam Durant ("Scaffold") or Christoph Büchel, especially his contribution to the Venice Biennial of 2015 ("The Mosque"). Common to all these artists is how their spectacular actions in public space have given rise to intense debates and sharp political responses, ranging from censorship to bans and even criminal proceedings. At the same time, the actions, sculptures or installations have consistently sparked discussions about the extent to which they can be considered art, or whether they are political demonstrations and provocations. Naturally, the issue of whether an action is defined as art or politics is critical to how works have been assessed and categorized. Artistic freedom, or "creative license," is often pitted against a—real or supposed—violation of law. But today, according to the artists, it is almost impossible to raise awareness for problems in a public sphere largely dominated by the media, unless one transgresses certain boundaries. In their statements the artists mentioned above repeatedly express a belief that it is necessary to step out of the classically sanctioned and protective space of the gallery, museum, or exhibition hall, in order to reach a different, wider audience and make a deeper, more powerful impact.