

For reading purposes only

Franziska Kabelitz | 2020
MA History of Art | Contemporary Art and the Global
Assignment (max. 330 words)

**Summary of Joan Kee's
*The World in Plain View: Form in the Service of the Global***

Kee's essay argues for a renewed formalist approach as an unbiased method for evaluating artworks. Here, form stands for formalism. This, the author stresses, rather than criteria of globalism, is essential for ensuring consistency of analysis across works originating in different geographic and temporal contexts. While an artist's biography will always remain relevant, the author supports a reorientation away from globalism's hyper-focus on ethnicity and locality of origin.

Kee defines globalism as a worldview, a notion that treats our planet as an intertwined sphere of inspiration, identity negotiation, mobility and production. However, she is highly critical of this view. Too often, Kee maintains, globalism has conflated rhetorics of cultural representation with specifications of what makes a strong artwork. As a result, globalist evaluation criteria are often biased and diffuse, whereas formalism allows clarity.

Furthermore, Kee criticises, artists themselves have used globalism to their advantage, slacking off on aesthetics and instead jumping on the bandwagon of identity politics. It's a catch-22 as "[c]ritics, historians, and curators tiptoe around the issue of quality" (96) fearing potentially destructive backlash.

Kee supports her argument with several case studies. For instance, instead of analysing Yang' Haegue's monochrome work from a globalist perspective, which zooms in on her ethnic or cultural heritage, interpretations should run through a formalist lens emphasising aesthetics. Whereas the former approach automatically connects notions of the monochrome to Korean dansaekhwa painting, thus locking Yang's work in a predetermined category of cultural representation, the latter appraises the work in its own right and grants autonomy to the artist.

Ultimately, though, formalism may in fact serve the aspirations of globalism – perhaps even better than globalism itself may. It does so by "mak[ing] possible a different view of the artwork as something other than a spokesperson of a particular context" (103). While Kee acknowledges that formalist approaches may miss sociopolitical discourses and legitimate narratives of identity negotiation, she maintains that their role is to inform a secondary layer of analysis rather than constituting the primary unit of comparison and juxtaposition.

Bibliography

Kee, Joan. "The World in Plain View: Form in the Service of the Global." In: Hudson, S. and A. Dumbadze (eds). *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, pp. 95-104.