

Tagung

Utopian Visions and Visionary Art: Beethoven's 'Empire of the Mind' Revisited

15.-17. März 2017
IFK
MUK
Wien Museum

The appearance 500 years ago in 1516 of "Utopia" by Thomas Morus struck a chord that continues to resound, since its fictive description of an ideal society holds a critique that remains relevant to the challenges of our own time. Cultural symbols for reform and aspiration—whether posited as an "effigy of the ideal" (Schiller) or as embodying a "principle of hope" (Bloch)—belong to this context. One such positive artistic symbol—Beethoven's music for the "Ode to Joy"—serves as the official hymn of the European Union.

Just over two centuries ago, in 1814, Beethoven declared his determination to elevate artistic creativity over worldly affairs: "I regard the empire of the mind as the best and highest of all spiritual and worldly realms". An evaluation of Beethoven's aesthetic views and spiritual aspirations helps clarify the tensional relation of art and politics while shedding light on the abiding appeal of his music up to the present.

This symposium explores cultural and political conditions in the wake of French Revolutionary and Napoleonic upheavals, reassessing the impact of aesthetic currents linked to Kant, Goethe, and Schiller among others on artworks of the early nineteenth century and beyond, and particularly on Beethoven's music. Fresh research on Beethoven's manuscripts has illuminated his working methods and aesthetic priorities. The composer's wide-ranging interest in mythology, non-linear temporality and philosophical notions of the unlimited invites attention. Beethoven's commitment to Schillerian idealism and the aesthetics of the sublime stands in contrast to his disenchantment with the politics of absolutism and the repressive Metternich regime in Austria. Reexamination of the cultural context and early reception of Beethoven's works is all the more instructive, in view of the often marginalized role of aesthetic priorities in modern life.

Konzeption

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