Session at ICMS (Kalamazoo, 12-15 May 16)

The International Congress on Medieval Studies (ICMS) at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI, May 12–15, 2016
Deadline: Sep 26, 2015

H-ArtHist Redaktion

Call for Papers for the Session:

[1] Too Christian?

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From: Jeanne-Marie Musto <musto.jeannemarie@gmail.com>
Subject: CFP: Too Christian?

Too Christian?: Confronting Religious "Excess" in the Presentation and Performance of Medieval Christian Literature, Art and Music

Twenty years ago New York's Jewish Museum presented the exhibition, "Too Jewish?: Challenging Traditional Identities." In introducing it the curator, Norman Kleeblatt, wrote of confronting his own, and an artist friend's, discomfort with "excessive" Jewish content in his friend's recent paintings. Both found the works extravagant, vulgar, overwhelming, radical and, in sum, embarrassing. The exhibition brought together numerous works that provoked similar reactions in order to confront this discomfort head-on. Ten years ago, in "Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking," MoMA presented contemporary art by Western artists (largely) from Islamic cultural backgrounds with a goal of breaking down stereotypes concerning the "Islamic world." Attempting to move beyond religious particularity while, at the same time, using that particularity as a springboard, the exhibition organizer, Fereshteh Daftari, used the question "Islamic or not?" as this exhibit's theme. Both exhibitions helped drive conversations concerning the value and complexity of art defined, through intention or reception, by religion.

This session seeks to broaden these conversations by taking a multidisciplinary approach to the question "Too Christian?" Rather than contemporary works, however, the session interrogates contemporary presentations of art produced by or for Christians during the medieval period. Contemporary scholars have underscored the deeply contextual significance --- both physical and intellectual -- of medieval Christian art, music, and literature. These studies have also illuminated the highly performative ways in which sacred images and objects were handled and understood, religious texts were read, liturgical song was sung. With these scholarly developments in mind, this session focuses on the legacy of presenting such materials in ways that have suppressed what has seemed, and perhaps still seems, extravagant, overwhelming, radical or even embarrassing in medieval Christian art, literature and music. The session intends, therefore, to examine what is erased when sacred works are presented without their religious specificity, and to

unintended consequences of that erasure.

The challenges of responsibly reintegrating medieval contexts and performativity into presentations of medieval Christian works will be kept in mind, but it is not the goal of this session to meet those challenges. Rather, the history of post-medieval presentations will provide a stage for considering when and to what effect discomfort with medieval Christian "excess" has produced fictions -- or covers -- that have enabled works intended for medieval Christians to meet non-medieval desires. A goal will be to determine how such fictions have impacted scholarly and public understanding. In contemplating these fictions, we will investigate to what extent the "passing" that they provide differs from, or provides analogies for, the presentation of non-Christian works. More broadly, this session will explore the tendency to overvalue the universality of medieval Christian works while underplaying the particular meanings they were created to convey, and functions they were intended to fulfill. In so doing, this session surveys false commonalities and false differences among medieval Christians, and false commonalities and differences between Christians and non-Christians.

Please submit **asap** (by 26 Sept) to: Sarah Anderson (sma@princeton.edu) and Jeanne-Marie Musto (musto.jeannemarie@gmail.com).

Reference:
CFP: Session at ICMS (Kalamazoo, 12-15 May 16). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 21, 2015 (accessed Nov 2, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/11019>.