

City of Sin – Representing the Urban Underbelly (Amsterdam, 19–20 May 16)

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum + Van Gogh Museum, May 19–20, 2016

Deadline: Dec 18, 2015

www.esnaonline.wordpress.com

Rachel Esner, European Society for Nineteenth-Century Art

European Society for Nineteenth-Century Art
Annual Conference 2016

City of Sin: Representing the Urban Underbelly in the Nineteenth Century

“The pageant of fashionable life and the thousands of floating existences - criminals and kept women - which drift about in the underworld of a great city [...] all prove to us that we have only to open our eyes to recognize our heroism [...]. The life of our city is rich in poetic and marvelous subjects.” – Charles Baudelaire, *Salon* of 1846

In the spring of 2016 Amsterdam will host two major exhibitions: *Easy Virtue: Prostitution in French Art, 1850-1910* (Van Gogh Museum, previously Musée d’Orsay) and *Girls in Kimono. The Breitner Variations* (Rijksmuseum). Both exhibitions explore the depiction of women in the margins of urban life – the prostitute, the model, working (class) women, and the women of the entertainment industry. In cooperation with the two museums, ESNA will take this occasion to organize its annual two-day international conference around the topic of the “urban underbelly” and its depiction in nineteenth-century art. The conference seeks to broaden the perspective of the two exhibitions by inviting papers that deal with urban marginality in the widest sense.

The conference takes as its motto Baudelaire’s 1846 call to artists to open their eyes to the darker side of nineteenth-century metropolitan life, not usually a topic of serious art historical study. In this sense, the conference aims to form a counter-canon that will provide a fuller picture of the “painting of modern life”. Rather than the daylight scenes featuring the typical flâneur so well known to the broader public, the conference will focus on the depiction of things that occur in the shadows. Topics to be explored may include, but are certainly not limited to: crime and punishment; criminals and their pursuers; gambling and other clandestine activities; female and male prostitutes; alcoholics and drug addicts; hobos and bohemians; the homeless and those who care for them; the (working) urban poor and the unemployed; the insane and the hysterical; the ill and the dying; the gay community, dandies, cross-dressers and transgenders *avant-la-lettre*; and practitioners and practices considered sexually or morally deviant. Contributions may deal with images in any medium, created in any urban center and at any time during the (long) nineteenth century (we especially welcome papers focusing on the early nineteenth-century).

Please send proposals (max. 300 words) for a 20-minute paper (in English) to esnaonline@hotmail.com by 18 December 2015 at the latest. Selected speakers will be contacted in the course of January 2016.

Organizing committee: Rachel Esner (University of Amsterdam) and Jenny Reynaerts (Rijksmuseum Amsterdam); Lisa Smit (Van Gogh Museum Amsterdam)

Scientific committee: Nienke Bakker (Van Gogh Museum Amsterdam); Richard Thomson (University of Edinburgh); Marjan Sterckx (Ghent University); Rachel Esner (University of Amsterdam); Jenny Reynaerts (Rijksmuseum Amsterdam); Jan Dirk Baetens (Rijksuniversiteit Nijmegen); Mayken Jonkman (RKD); Maite van Dijk (Van Gogh Museum)

Reference:

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