Rethinking Art History and Visual Culture (Johannesburg, 28–31 Jul 16)

University of Johannesburg, Jul 28–31, 2016
Deadline: Mar 15, 2016

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Rethinking Art History and Visual Culture in a Contemporary Context

The “Rhodes Must Fall” and “Fees Must Fall” campaigns which arose in South Africa in the course of 2015, while focused on transformative agendas in a broad sense, also emphasised how various inheritances from the West have played a fundamental role in shaping universities – not only in terms of their curricula but also their institutional cultures more generally. Occurring in a context where the humanities are under threat and where neoliberal forces may upset what we understand as fundamental to the academic project, these recent calls for critical engagement with institutional histories and practices suggest that reconsideration of disciplinary knowledges and understandings have become increasingly urgent.

In this conference we seek to take stock of what we do in art history (and related areas of exploration) in light of new calls for transformation and relevance. Some of the questions this might involve are the following:
• What do we understand by an imperative to “decolonise” the university and/or our discipline/s, and are such agendas feasible and productive?
• What kinds of topics, themes and areas of exploration are relevant to art history and visual culture studies in South Africa in the 21st century?
• How have calls for transformation within the academy had a bearing on the perspectives we might adopt to understand art, architecture and visual culture – whether contemporary or historical – from outside the academy?
• How might a politics of race and anti-imperialism inform not only what we explore but also how we go about the practices of research? In this regard, are there theorists whose work we ought to consider more than we do, and are there different methodologies we ought to employ?
• If resistance associated with the Rhodes Must Fall campaign focused primarily on a politics of race, should equal attention not also be directed at the implications of gender or class on visual representation?
• What might be the role of community engagement initiatives within the academic project?
• How might a decolonising impetus as well as a drive towards promoting inclusivity affect not only curricula but also educational practices?
• How might such transformative agendas affect curatorial initiatives, public art or the collecting of art?
• To what extent have other kinds of changes in recent years – such as developments within the digital domain – offered new opportunities to facilitate such critical engagement with art histori-

cal practices?

We invite presentations of 20 minutes that focus on particular examples or case studies that can contribute towards addressing the above questions or indeed any others which have a bearing on art history's relevance and changing roles within the present.

Please send a title of your proposed paper, an abstract of between 300 and 400 words as well as your affiliation and contact details to karenv@uj.ac.za by 15 March 2016. Please write the words "SAVAH conference proposal" in the subject line of your e-mail.

Reference:

CFP: Rethinking Art History and Visual Culture (Johannesburg, 28-31 Jul 16). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 1, 2016 (accessed Nov 20, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/12335>.