# Representing the Urban Underbelly in the 19th Century (Amsterdam, 19-20 May 16)

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum + Van Gogh Museum, May 19–20, 2016
Registration deadline: May 13, 2016

Rachel Esner, University of Amsterdam

City of Sin: Representing the Urban Underbelly in the 19th Century

In conjunction with the exhibitions "Easy Virtue: Prostitution in French Art, 1850-1910" (Van Gogh Museum) and "Breitner: Girl in Kimono" (Rijksmuseum), ESNA (European Society for Nineteenth-Century Art) organizes its annual two-day international conference around the topic of the "urban underbelly" and its depiction in nineteenth-century art. 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. The conference seeks to broaden this perspective by exploring topics concerned with all kinds of practitioners and practices considered morally deviant. Ranging from prostitution and pornography to criminals and their pursuers, from gambling and substance abuse to dandies and bohemians, from the homeless and the urban poor to the insane and the ill: City of Sin will cover 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.

Registration
Prices: Normal registration: €80 | Student registration: €30 Online registration for the conference is now open.
You will find the registration form on the Rijksmuseum website: https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/city-of-sin

PROGRAMME

Day 1 – Thursday 19 May

10.00-10.30
Registration
Coffee & tea

10.30-10.45
Welcome by Taco Dibbits, Director of Collections, Rijksmuseum

Introduction by Rachel Esner, University of Amsterdam | ESNA

10.45-11.15
The Van Gogh Museum Lecture – Private pleasures: Prostitution in prints
Fleur Roos Rosa de Carvalho, Curator of prints & drawings, Van Gogh Museum

11.15-12.30
Session 1. Revealing the invisible
Chair: Marjan Sterckx, Ghent University

Visualizing obscenity in Paris: Manet's Déjeuner, Olympia and Nana as markers of pornographic commerce and censorship
Lauren S. Weingarden, Department of Art History, Florida State University

Evidence and identity in the Register Bb3?
David Ogawa, Department of Visual Arts, Union College, Schenectady

Not to be seen: Hidden aspects of prostitution through its representations
Claire Dupin, independent scholar

12.30-14.30
Lunch
Visit to the Breitner Exhibition (Rijksmuseum)

14.30-15.45

Session 2. Vice and illness
Chair: Jan Dirk Baetens, Radboud University | ESNA

Gambling hells and the urban den of iniquity: Gaming, immigration, and American identity
Andrew Haslit, University of Texas at Tyler

Illuminating addiction: Morphinomania in fin-de-siècle visual culture
Natalia Angeles Vieyra, Temple University, Philadelphia

Vincent van Gogh and the illnesses of his time: From venereal disease to epilepsy
Laura Prins, Van Gogh Museum

15.45-16.15
Coffee & tea

16.15-17.30

Session 3. The city's fringes
Chair: Jenny Reynaerts, Rijkmuseum | ESNA

The urban underbelly's washboard abs: Strongman Eugen Sandow as an artist's model in Brussels 1887-1889
Thijs Dekeukeleire, Ghent University

Max Klinger and the shadow side of Berlin
Marsha Morton, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn

Documents of an unseen city: Heinrich Zille's early photographs and drawings of proletarian Berlin
Pay Matthis Karstens, Technische Universität Berlin

18.00
Drinks
Visit to Easy Virtue Exhibition (Van Gogh Museum)

Day 2 – Friday 20 May

10.00-10.15
Welcome by Axel Rüger, Director Van Gogh Museum

10.15-10.45
The Rijksmuseum Lecture – Breitner's Girls in kimono: 'Women of dubious appearance and brazen pose'
Suzanne Veldink, Junior curator 19th-century paintings, Rijksmuseum

10.45-12.00

Session 4. The aesthetics of prostitution
Chair: Maite van Dijk, Van Gogh Museum | ESNA

'L'Olympia faisandée': Meat as metaphor for the prostitute
Allison Deutsch, University College London

Beauty on sale: Women in the margins of urban life in 19th-century Hungarian painting
Réka Krasznai, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

The prostitute as a subject in 19th-century Italian sculpture: Unexpected seeds of modernity
Sharon Hecker, independent scholar

12.00-13.45
Lunch
Visit to the Breitner Exhibition (Rijksmuseum)

13.45-15.30

Session 5. City of Darkness
Chair: Mayken Jonkman, RKD | ESNA

Screening of "De Steeg" by Jan Koelinga (Rotterdam, 1932)?with an introduction by Lisa Smit, ESNA

Touring the dark city: The Paris catacombs in 19th-century visual culture?
Isabelle Havet, University of Delaware

Dark arts: Art in the clandestine cabaret in the Parisian fin de siècle: Cabaret de l’Enfer et du Ciel
Juliet Simpson, Coventry University and Wolfson College, Oxford

15.30-16.00
Cofee & tea

16.00-16.20
Behind the scenes of Easy Virtue
Nienke Bakker, Curator Van Gogh Museum and co-curator of Easy Virtue

16.20-17.00
Concluding lecture – Presenting prostitution now: Ruminations on the exhibitions, the conference and the ‘traffic’ in women?
Tamar Garb, Professor of the Department History of Art, University College London

17.00-17.30
Discussion
Chair: Rachel Esner, University of Amsterdam | ESNA

Reference:
CONF: Representing the Urban Underbelly in the 19th Century (Amsterdam, 19-20 May 16). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 14, 2016 (accessed Nov 4, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/12456>.