

The Medium and the Message (Birmingham, 1-2 Jul 2016)

Birmingham, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Jul 1-02, 2016

David Hemsoll

The Medium and the Message: Re-evaluating Form and Meaning in European Architecture c. 1400-1950

Location: The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, The University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B152TS

About the Conference: All buildings – whether polite, vernacular or somewhere in between – were initially informed by some kind of presiding idea or set of ideas. Some of these ideas presumed an audience (and are therefore part of the building's rhetoric and essential to its intended 'meaning'), while others did not (in being part, for example, of a production process, or allied with social and cultural contexts, and no more than that). All such ideas should concern the architectural historian, but the most engaging and historically resonant may well belong to the first category and also be ones that can be inferred and recovered from the buildings themselves. The architectural historian may also profit from a keener understanding of how the ideas initially underpinning a building may, in time, have become modified, or even eclipsed by associations of very different kinds.

The conference will investigate the ways in which ideas are conveyed by the physical and visual medium of architectural form. It will include case studies which will move us beyond explanations of architecture that borrow too liberally from literature and theory, and will thereby deepen our understanding both of the medium of architecture and of the construction and operation of architectural 'meaning'. Moreover, by establishing or re-exploring the intellectual foundations sustaining the designs of certain key buildings, and by examining the ways in which they informed the physical realities of the buildings themselves, we hope to reinvigorate and enrich our understanding of significant moments in European architectural history.

Programme

Friday 1 July

10-00 Registration

10.30 Anthony GERAGHTY/David HEMSOLL: Introduction & welcome

Sigrid DE JONG (Leiden): Keynote - Sensing Architecture's Sense

Session 1

11-30 Paul DAVIES (Reading): Design and Meaning in Brunelleschi's Foundling Hospital

11-50 Il KIM (Auburn, Alabama): Nicolaus Cusanus's St Nikolaus Hospital (1458) in Bernkastel-Kues (Germany): Metaphysics in Number and Angle Embedded in Architecture

12-10 Angeliki POLLALI (American College of Greece, Athens): Architectural Motifs in Quattrocento to Practice: Intricate Interrelationships Between Function and Antique Meaning

Session 2

2-00 Olivia HORSFALL TURNER (Victoria and Albert Museum): Meaning in Materials in Seventeenth-Century English Architecture

2-20 James JAGO (York): 'This Adjacent House': The Representation of Saint Stephen's Chapel, Westminster, as the House of Commons in the Seventeenth Century

2-40 Kristina HAGEN (Heidelberg): Form and Meaning of Monastic Manor Houses in South-Western Germany and Switzerland c. 1600-1720

Session 3

4-00 Richard HEWLINGS (Historic England): Chiswick House: Appearance and Meaning

4-20 Peter LINDFIELD (Stirling): An Ancient House for a Modern Abbott: the Case of Lee Priory, Kent ('a Child of Strawberry Hill')

4-40 Ciarán Rua O'NEILL (York): A Punishment on Posterity: John Soane and the Caryatid

Saturday 2 July

10.30 Anthony GERAGHTY/David HEMSOLL: Introduction & welcome

Christine STEVENSON (Courtauld Institute): Keynote - Whose Medium? Whose Message? - the Charms of Architectural Equivocation

Session 1

11-30 Mark WILSON JONES (Bath): Copying as a Means of Communicating Through Architecture

11-50 Timo HAGEN (Heidelberg): Theophil Hansen's Byzantine Revival Chapels and Their Successors: Architectural 'Otherness' in Differing Contexts

12-10 Nathaniel WALKER (Charleston): An Eden Under Glass: Scientific Devotion at the Oxford Museum

Session 2

2-00 Neil Jackson (Liverpool): Impolite Architecture: The 'Message' of the Nineteenth-Century Speculative House

2-20 Lori SMITHEY (Ann Arbor): Sacré-Cœur Basilica: Monument of Decadence

2-40 Lucy WANG (Northwestern): The Woolworth Building: Examining the 'Cathedral of Commerce' and the Commerce of Cathedrals c. 1913-1930

Session 3

4-00 Harald STÜHLINGER (Zürich): Messages in Urban Space: the Architecture of Red Vienna

4-20 Fabrizio BALLABIO (Architectural Association): Matter and Motif in an Early Work of Mies van der Rohe

The conference will conclude with a drinks reception held in the foyer of the Barber Institute.

Tickets for the conference cost £10 and are purchased via an 'online shop':

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/lcahm/departments/historyofart/events/2016/medium-message-conference.aspx>

Student applicants: Ten grants each of £30 are being offered by the Society of Architectural Historians Great Britain to registered students based outside Birmingham, to cover the £10 conference fee and to help defray costs; these will be awarded strictly on a 'first come first served' basis, and, to apply, you should contact David Hemsoll (d.e.hemsoll@bham.ac.uk) before 8 June heading your message 'student request for conference support'.

Reference:

CONF: The Medium and the Message (Birmingham, 1-2 Jul 2016). In: ArtHist.net, May 26, 2016 (accessed Mar 21, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/13110>>.