Gothic Modernisms (Amsterdam, 29-30 Jun 17)

The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Jun 29–30, 2017
Deadline: Dec 20, 2016

Juliet Simpson

'Gothic Modernisms' - Call for Papers
29 & 30 June, 2017, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, NL

Organized by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Coventry University; the Amsterdam School for Heritage, Memory and Material Culture, in collaboration with the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; the Ateneum Art Museum / Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki, and Radboud University, Nijmegen

Confirmed keynote speaker: Prof. Elizabeth Emery (Montclair State University, US)

The 'Gothic' has permeated visual and cultural ideas and practices of modernity. Yet the presence of a 'Gothic Modernity' or Gothic Modernisms challenges fundamental perceptions of how 'modernism' from the late nineteenth-century onwards has been historicized, created, produced and seen. The opposition of a 'Gothic' pre-modern past to a modern present, of age/decline or infancy to rebirth/progress, has since Jacob Burckhardt's The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy (1860) presented such dualities as pivotal to narratives of Western modern art, construed as opposing and sublimating the 'pre-modern'. From these perspectives, the very idea of a 'Gothic' becomes reified as a temporal abstraction – a trope, relegated to the 'middle', the 'pre-', 'the 'dark', as the eminent French medievalist Jacques Le Goff has pointed out. This conference seeks to challenge such polarities, developing Le Goff's idea of 'un Gothique noir' (an 'unseen' Gothic), of a modern(ist) Gothic spirit and sensibility, that is insufficiently studied, historicized or understood. The conference proposes, instead, a thorough-going engagement with the pre-modern and Gothic as a disruptive teleology and identity within late 19th- and 20th-century visual and cultural modernisms. Critically implicated in their ideologies and remaking of cultures, communities, sites and identities of art, this reshapes familiar constructs of Naturalism, Symbolism and Modernism. Further, seen from the perspectives of a 'Gothic modernity', this conference foregrounds underpinning arguments of history, religion, language, belief, inheritance and geo-political tussles, eclipsed or elided in canonical accounts of this period's art. For Medieval gothic culture and aesthetics emerges as deeply entwined with modern art, art historiography, art literatures, collection-formation and museum design of the later nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth. From the Gothic revivals and appropriations of 19th-century Romantic artists, writers and historians, to the neo-medievalism of pre-Raphaelite art; from the Gothic alterities of the 'fin de siècle', to Expressionism and Surrealism, 'Gothic' as histories and recreation, as haunting and present reality, is everywhere manifest. The Gothic inspires founding historiographies of 20th-century art, museums, aesthetics, identities of culture and expressions of 'nation-hood', from the 1902 Bruges exhibition Les Primitifs Flamands to rival exhibitions Les Primitifs français (Paris 1904) and Meisterwerke Westdeutscher

Malerei (Düsseldorf 1904); from John Duncan's Anima Celtica (1895) to Wilhelm Worringer's Formprobleme der Gotik (1911), to Johan Huizinga's Waning of the Middle Ages (1919).

Gothic Modernisms will focus on the (global) legacies, histories and contested identities of Northern European Gothic/early-modern visual cultures in modernity and, in particular, on identities of modernism, including avant-gardes. It builds on two preceding, related conferences on 'Primitive Renaissances' (The National Gallery, London, 2014) and 'Visions of the North' (Compton Verney Museum, 2016), which have opened new scholarship on 19th- and early 20th-century responses to Northern Renaissance and early Germanic art. Gothic Modernisms will expand this field of enquiry and its temporal scope. It explores the pivotal, yet still understudied, reception, construction and invention of Northern Gothic art and reception in the period spanning the 1880s to the 1950s, extending interest in Latin and Germanic Gothic to the 'Nordic' world. We term these artistic and cultural reinventions 'gothic modernisms'.
The conference thus aims to develop both a broad perspective in relation to gothic modernisms and a deepening of the issues—methodological, theoretical, aesthetic, archival—pertinent to this subject. In particular, we seek papers which pose fresh questions about the modern reception and practices of medieval art in institutions and museums, as well as in art, art historiographies, art writings and broader visual-cultural contexts.
Further: the conference aims to revisit and examine Gothic/early-modern reinventions and appropriations in later 19th- and early 20th-century modernisms from original, to date unexplored, perspectives. We seek to explore competing 'Gothic' identities (Francophone, Flemish, Anglo-Germanic, Nordic, Celtic, Latinate, Slavic, via histories, images and artefacts), crossing national and geo-cultural borders, as well as to shape new nationalisms. The objective is to interrogate multiple routes through which medievalisms were construed disruptively, nationally and transnationally, to reimagine new artistic and cultural identities. These include ideas of community, canonicity, avant-gardes, sites, cults, nature, the spectral, the popular/'people', alterity, and aesthetic and political hybridity. We therefore also invite papers that engage with identities of gothic modernity and modernisms which challenge fundamental constructs of periodicity and modernist 'canons', crossing cultural and aesthetic boundaries, including to non-Western frameworks.

Papers/panels are invited in (but not limited to) the following suggested areas:
- Gothic Identities/Empires: Latin, Germanic, Teutonic, Nordic Gothics at the 'tournant de siècle'
- 'Gothic' cartographies and national revivals in 19th-/early 20th- century exhibitions, art, art writing
- Challenging periodicity; histories, Gothic rewritings, cultural memories/monuments – towards a 'Gothic present'; the Northern Gothic Modern 'Genius'
- Museal Gothics: Collecting/ Exhibiting/ Photographing/ Displaying Gothic modernities/ Renaissances
- Gothic sites and modernity – pilgrimages, rituals of art
- (Imagined) Gothic sites in expressionist, surrealist, or other avant-gardist film and photography
- Rooted/Transnational-cosmopolitan Gothic modernisms/communities of art (late 19th and 20th centuries)
- Nordic Gothic modernities
- Cathedrals of art/culture: architectures, design, cities – Gothic Modern citadels/ spaces and avant-gardes
- 'Neo-Gothic' Modernities in architecture/interiors

- New ‘Dark Ages’ and Gothic alterities
- The uncanny presence of the ‘gothic’ in avant-gardes
- Gothic modernist spiritualisms: modernist artist/writer monastics: Zealots, Hedonists, Saints, Martyrs
- Gothic Modern bodies in modernist art and visual cultures
- Migrating-transitional objects/Gothic relics/taboo
- Gothic ‘Others’ and the silences of history

Proposals of max. 300 words should be sent to both:
juliet.simpson@coventry.ac.uk and t.m.bauduin@uva.nl by 20 December 2016.
Please include the following details with your abstract: name and surname; affiliation; contact e-mail address; and short biography, incl. a brief overview of most relevant publications. The organizers warmly welcome proposals from early-career researchers.

Proposals will be selected by peer-review. A publication based on the conference papers is envisaged.
Conference Organizing Committee:
Prof. Dr. Juliet Simpson, Coventry University, UK
Dr. Tessel M. Bauduin, University of Amsterdam, NL
Dr. Jenny Reynaerts, The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, NL
Dr. Jan Dirk Baetens, Radboud University, Nijmegen, NL
Prof. Dr. Anna-Maria von Bonsdorff, Ateneum Art Museum/Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki, FI

‘Gothic Modernisms’ forms the culminating event in a trilogy of conferences investigating the modern and modernist reception of Northern medieval and Renaissance masters in Europe, beginning with ‘Primitive Renaissances’ (National Gallery, London: 2014) and continuing with ‘Visions of the North’ (Compton Verney Museum, UK: 2016).

This conference will take place at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Reference:
CFP: Gothic Modernisms (Amsterdam, 29-30 Jun 17). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 2, 2016 (accessed Nov 19, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/14109>.