

On the Agency of Interior Spaces (Cambridge, 13-14 Oct 17)

The Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, MA, Oct 13-14, 2017

Deadline: Apr 15, 2017

Laura Igoe

The Room Where It Happens: On the Agency of Interior Spaces
October 13-14, 2017

A symposium hosted by the
Harvard Art Museums

Keynote Speaker:
Louis Nelson, University of Virginia

This symposium, held in conjunction with the Harvard Art Museum's forthcoming exhibition, *The Philosophy Chamber: Art and Science in Harvard's Teaching Cabinet, 1766-1820*, seeks papers that investigate spaces of artistic, artisanal and intellectual production throughout global history. From artist's studios to experimental laboratories, from offices to political chambers, rooms and their contents have long impacted history and transformed their inhabitants. We invite case studies that address questions like the following: How might an assemblage of objects within a given space intersect or clash with ideological narratives? How have secret or privileged rooms, or rooms to which access is limited, served to obfuscate and facilitate the generation and dissemination of ideas? As historians and critics, how should we interpret and recreate such spaces—many of which no longer exist?

The *Philosophy Chamber* exhibition, on view at the Harvard Art Museums from May 19 to December 31, 2017, will explore the history and collections of one of the most unusual rooms in early America. Between 1766 and 1820, the *Philosophy Chamber*, a grand room adjacent to the College Library on Harvard's Campus, was home to more than one thousand artifacts, images and specimens. Named for the discipline of Natural Philosophy, a cornerstone of the college's Enlightenment-era curriculum that wove together astronomy, mathematics, physics and other sciences interrogating natural objects and physical phenomena, the *Philosophy Chamber* served as a lecture hall, experimental lab, picture gallery and convening space. Frequented by an array of artists, scientists, travelers and revolutionaries, the room and its collections stood at the center of artistic and scholarly life at Harvard and the New England region for more than fifty years. The exhibition considers the wide-ranging conversations, debates, and ideas that animated this grand room and the objects and architectural elements that shaped, supported or unintentionally undermined these discourses.

Potential case study “rooms” include:

- Teaching cabinets
- Workshops
- Civic spaces
- Laboratories
- Domestic spaces
- Toxic rooms
- Secret rooms
- Studies or offices
- Artist studios
- Theaters
- Classrooms or lecture halls
- Chatrooms or other digital “rooms” and platforms
- Museum and gallery installations
- Exchanges
- Train Stations
- Ruins, war-torn rooms

Due the interdisciplinary nature of this symposium, we welcome proposals from a variety of fields, including art history, architectural history, material culture studies, history, English and literature studies, American studies, anthropology, and archaeology, as well as the fine arts.

To apply, please submit a 300-word abstract and two-page CV to laura_igoe@harvard.edu by April 15, 2017.

Reference:

CFP: On the Agency of Interior Spaces (Cambridge, 13-14 Oct 17). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 31, 2017 (accessed Sep 13, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/14648>>.