The Museum as Mirror (Florence, 23-24 Nov 17)

Florence, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut, Nov 23–24, 2017
Deadline: Jul 15, 2017

Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut

Call for papers
The Museum as Mirror - Reflections on Encounters between People and Objects

Workshop to be held at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut

The use of selfie sticks in museums and recent museum policies excluding or indeed encouraging the practice have triggered two kinds of concern. On the one hand, the presence of the selfie stick is considered to be a dangerous material extension of the visitor's body and a potential source of damage and disturbance. On the other hand, its popularity begs the question: how do visitors bond with objects in museums and what are they identifying with in this seemingly narcissistic engagement with objects, artworks and monuments as they stagger back and forth in order to find the best shot? The museum selfie can be understood as a contemporary metaphor for the visitors' desire to document their own individual and embodied experience of an exhibit. Yet this experience—although seemingly unique and personal—is mediated by the conceptual frames the museum itself embodies, which include: aesthetic delectation, academic inquiry and identity formation. In fact, the museum functions at a critical juncture in the mutually constitutive relationship between the visitor's body, the material space of physical objects (displays, architecture) and the construction of social and cultural concepts (such as national identity, race, and gender).

A long intellectual tradition has maintained a subject/object divide in Western thinking, which has meant that this juncture remains something of a blind spot. More recently, a turn towards material studies has attempted to blur the conceptual boundaries between people and objects through new perspectives on the social lives of things, thing theory, and affect theory. However, this so-called post-humanist trend tends to focus on the object more so than on its effect on the subject. Just as art historians study the origins and history of objects before they enter the museum, so too must we take seriously the specificity of visitors to museums and their histories and experiences of race, sex, gender, culture, religion, class, queer, trans and other identities. This workshop will aim to put these many modalities of analysis of the subject/object relationship into a more balanced dialogue with a rigorous focus on the intersectional experience of bodies (people and objects) across multiple vectors of identity. We seek to analyze how material, cultural, social and political construction functions on both sides of this subject/object relationship as both come inscribed with histories and identities and can also change or mutually reinforce one another within the space of the museum.

Encounters between humans and objects in museums are mediated and animated by a number of different factors, which may be culturally shared and transmitted but at the same time are not stable, fixed, or automatic. These factors include: time, space and culture. The temporality of the encounter may be inflected by the time difference between the origin of the object and the person, time-period, or how time is constructed—for both people and objects—according to paradigms like modernism, classicism or primitivism. The space of the encounter includes the museum's location, architecture, mode of display, or purpose (for example, nation building, identity formation, memorial, aesthetic or religious experience). Finally, we are interested in how the histories, belief systems and cultural codes that are manifested by both people and objects inscribe, or in some cases forbid, their encounter.

We encourage papers that analyze these encounters in museums as portrayed by artists through visual practices such as painting, print, sculpture, film, photography, and performative practices; linguistically in literary accounts; or aurally in music, audio or other formats. We are also interested in more collective attempts to analyze these encounters such as sociological studies or accounts in journals or other media.

Applications in English consisting of an abstract of 400 words and a short C.V. in a single PDF should be submitted by July 15, 2017 to alison.boyd@khi.fi.it. Contributions for travel expenses will be available.

The workshop is part of the activities taking place within the framework of the Max Planck Research Group "Objects in the Contact Zone – The Cross-Cultural Lives of Things" (http://www.khi.fi.it/4826975/).

Convenors:
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Further information:
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Reference:

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