

Mistress-Pieces (Johannesburg, 8–10 Nov 18)

University of Johannesburg, Nov 8–10, 2018

Deadline: Feb 28, 2018

Brenda Schmahmann, University of Johannesburg

Mistress-Pieces: Iconic Artworks by Feminists and Gender Activists

This is a call for papers, a selection of which will be identified for further development into an edited volume. The conference will take place at the offices of the NRF Research Chair in South African Art and Visual Culture at the University of Johannesburg.

THE THEME

If one was asked to name an iconic feminist work, Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* in the Brooklyn Museum would likely come to mind. Inverting the Last Supper into a celebration of female contributions to societies across the ages, it also recognised artmaking processes – ceramics and embroidery – that tended to be marginalised in discourses about fine art. Perhaps most crucially, this ambitious initiative spoke to art and design inheritances while simultaneously invoking contemporary currents as well as assuming a visual form that suggested new potential aesthetic directions for feminist art.

In this conference, the intention is to identify and explore a range of other works by feminists and gender activists that might be regarded as iconic in the sense that they have proved influential in particular contexts because of their relevance and distinctiveness, but which have not hitherto necessarily achieved the level of international recognition accorded Chicago's *Dinner Party*. The topic is grounded in the understanding that the forms art by feminists or LGBT activists may have assumed, and their overall impact, differ from one geographical context to another. It is also underpinned by recognition that, given the momentous political and cultural shifts that have occurred since second-wave feminism began to exert impact on aesthetic practices in the United States, Britain and Western Europe, new works engaging with gender will necessarily be inflected or shaped by different sets of concerns, whether these be related to the impact of the internet, social media and a digital age or new manifestations of violence, civil war and nationalism, threats to the environment or understandings of identity in the context of diasporas, for example.

"Mistress-Pieces" riffs on "Old Mistresses", the ironical term that Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock used within the title of their important volume first published in 1981. This conference does not seek to develop a history of women artists in the west, however, but rather focuses specifically on artworks informed by feminist and gender discourses that have emerged since the 1970s in an international context. By offering this perspective, it is hoped that this conference and the publication envisaged to follow it will enhance recognition of not only commonalities but also contrasts between different manifestations of gender politics in the visual arts.

PROPOSALS

A prospective presenter is invited to offer a 30-minute paper focusing on an artwork (or series) from any geography that might be considered an iconic manifestation of concerns with gender. Exploring the work in light of gender politics within the context and timeframe in which it was made, a contributor should indicate its significance and import while also revealing how the insights being offered are different to what might already have been written about it.

Papers must be on material that has not already been published. A prospective presenter must be willing to develop the proposed paper into a chapter of about 6000 words within a published volume, should it be selected for inclusion in the book prospectus that will be developed after the conference. Papers must be in English.

Please submit your proposal with "Mistress-Pieces" in the subject line, and send it to the convenor, Brenda Schmahmann (brendas@uj.ac.za), and copied to the administrator at the offices of the NRF Research Chair in South African Art and Visual Culture, Neelofir Nagdee (nnagdee@uj.ac.za), by 28 February 2018. Please submit a single WORD document with the following information:

1. a title for your paper
2. an abstract between 350 and 500 words in length for a 30-minute paper
3. a short biography, including your current institutional affiliation (about 200 words)
4. your contact details, i.e. e-mail address, postal address, telephone number/s

Applicants will be notified of decisions by no later than mid-April.

FUNDING

Although presenters will need to arrange and pay for their own travel costs to Johannesburg, they will not be charged a conference fee and the host will provide accommodation and meals for the duration of the conference. Please note, however, that if a paper is co-authored, this support can be given to only one presenter.

Reference:

CFP: Mistress-Pieces (Johannesburg, 8-10 Nov 18). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 13, 2018 (accessed Apr 7, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/17082>>.