

## 5 Sessions at AAH (Brighton, 4-6 Apr 19)

Brighton

Deadline: Nov 5, 2018

Halle O'Neal; Timothy Stott; Maibritt Borgen; Michelle Foot; Lucy Weir; Jean Baird; Jonathan P Watts; Tilo Reifenstein, Association for Art History Annual Conference, University of Brighton

[1] Recovering the Ritual Object in Medieval and Early Modern Art

[2] Building a Planetary Imaginary: Information design, contemporary art, and environmental politics

[3] Occult Performances and Reflections: The Everyday Occult in Visual Culture

[4] Rereading Photography Theory of the 1980s

[5] 'Fiction with footnotes': Writing art history as literary practice

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[1] Session: Recovering the Ritual Object in Medieval and Early Modern Art

Session Convenors:

Dr Catriona Murray, University of Edinburgh, c.a.murray@ed.ac.uk

Dr Halle O'Neal, University of Edinburgh, halle.o'neal@ed.ac.uk

Deadline: 5 November 2018

In the medieval and early modern worlds, ritual served as a legitimising process, a dynamic mechanism for mediating a transference or transformation of status. Objects played an essential part in this performative practice, charged with symbolism and invested with power. Distanced from their original contexts, however, these artefacts have often been studied for their material properties, disconnecting function from form and erasing layers of meaning. The relationships between ritual objects and ritual participants were identity-forming, reflecting and shaping belief structures. Understanding of how these objects were experienced as well as viewed, is key to revealing their significances.

This panel intends to relocate ritual objects at the centre of both religious and secular ceremonies, interrogating how they served as both signifiers and agents of change. The organisers specialise in early modern British art and medieval Japanese art, and so we invite proposals from a range of geographical perspectives, in order to investigate this subject from a cross-cultural perspective. We particularly encourage papers which discuss medieval and early modern ritual objects - broadly defined - as social mediators.

Issues for discussion include but are not limited to:

- Recovery of the everyday in ritual objects
- Embodiment
- Audiences and interactions

- Performativity
- Ritual object as emotional object
- Spatiality and temporality
- Re-use, recycling, removal
- Illusion and imagination
- Memory
- Thing theory

Please email your paper proposal direct to the session convenors, details above. Provide a title and abstract (250 words maximum) for a 25-minute paper, your name and institutional affiliation (if any).

[\[2\]](#) Building a Planetary Imaginary: Information design, contemporary art, and environmental politics

#### Session Convenors

Timothy Stott, Dublin School of Creative Arts, Dublin Institute of Technology tim.stott@dit.ie

Maibritt Borgen, Yale University mbborgen@gmail.com

#### Session Abstract

Charts, plans, tables, graphs, and diagrams are foremost in the dissemination of scientific data and knowledge. These types of information design are 'knowledge generators' (Johanna Drucker) as much as representations of existing states of affairs, which help to think systems, correlations, and future scenarios across scales, from the microbial to the planetary. As they make complex global ecologies legible and consequential to the public, they are central to the everyday politics of our current climate regime.

With the renewed urgency of this knowledge today, this session investigates how contemporary artists and curators have used information design to build, challenge, and expand a planetary imaginary in the face of ecological disaster. Whereas photographs of the planet in its entirety mobilised the previous generation of environmental art and politics, the planetary now emerges in complexes of data and information. We therefore ask: How has information design expanded into a set of artistic and curatorial strategies that engage the epistemology and function of science? How do contemporary artworks, projects, and exhibitions use information design to think through planetary complexities and contingencies in the public domain? How does this planetary imaginary compare to that of global economies and infrastructures? By connecting information design and a planetary imaginary, this session seeks to re-orient toward environmental politics current debates about the diagrammatic and the informational as major tropes of contemporary art.

#### To offer a paper

Please email your paper proposals direct to the session convenors, details above.

Provide a title and abstract (250 words maximum) for a 25-minute paper (unless otherwise specified), your name and institutional affiliation (if any).

Please make sure the title is concise and reflects the contents of the paper because it will appear online, in social media and in the printed programme.

You should receive an acknowledgement of receipt of your submission within two weeks from the session convenors.

Deadline for submissions: Monday 5 November 2018

[\[3\]](#) Occult Performances and Reflections: The Everyday Occult in Visual Culture

The occult – the hidden – has been prevalent in various art forms for centuries. Christopher Partridge coined the term ‘occulture’ in 2004 in an effort to recognise the occult in the everyday, theorising the processes involved when popular culture disseminates occult ideas and beliefs to a wider audience. These occult and esoteric traditions are no longer hidden; instead the culture in which they are embedded has become familiar – they are ordinary and everyday.

Visual culture, as part of a broader popular culture, represents a fertile vehicle for the occult to enter everyday consciousness, even when the esoteric origins of those ideas remain unknown to the receiver. This is in opposition to secretive practices of a cultic milieu, when the occult was intended for an exclusive audience privileged with sacred and mysterious knowledge, such as, for example, ritual performances by and for adepts of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

This session proposes to investigate the reflection and representation of occult ideas, beliefs and practices that manifest in everyday and popular forms of art from the 1870s to the present day. Focusing particularly on performance art, such as theatre and dance, as well as film, photography and print, this session would invite papers to explore occult currents in visual culture from any geographical location. In addition to academic papers, this session would welcome interdisciplinary approaches from performers and artists.

Session Convenors

Michelle Foot, University of Edinburgh [mfoot@exseed.ed.ac.uk](mailto:mfoot@exseed.ed.ac.uk)

Lucy Weir, University of Edinburgh [lucy.weir@ed.ac.uk](mailto:lucy.weir@ed.ac.uk)

To offer a paper

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Deadline for submissions: Monday 5 November 2018

[\[4\]](#) Rereading Photography Theory of the 1980s

Session Convenors

Jean Baird, Nottingham Trent School of Art & Design [jean.baird@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:jean.baird@ntu.ac.uk)

Jonathan P Watts, Nottingham Trent School of Art & Design [jonathan.watts@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:jonathan.watts@ntu.ac.uk)

Session Abstract

Two years ago, in an article titled 'The World's Most Amazing 100% Awesome Photography Theory', published in the journal 'Photographies', the academic Sharon Harper identified how photography undergraduate courses had 'not developed the scope of its subject matter or developed its theoretical horizons sufficiently'.

Harper argues that the legacies of photography theory's engagement with semiotics, psychoanalysis and Marxist thought continue to be the critical credibility that higher education courses trade on today. This characterisation of photography theory is exemplified by the canonical 1982 anthology 'Thinking Photography', edited by Victor Burgin. In fact, Harper continues, its methods of analysis and ideological critique are now limitations to the development of academia and pedagogy. (Harper is not alone in critiquing photography theory of the 1980s.)

Burgin, however, cared deeply about developing an account of the production of meaning of a photograph within everyday social institutions located within specific histories, recognising the importance of identifying cultural context and its everyday uses, not just within fine art, but also advertising, journalism and domestic spaces.

'Thinking Photography' worked with some notion of the photograph's specificity, which is now, as it has been for some time, more imprecise in an age of wild media convergence of the accelerated networked image (Daniel Rubinstein and Katrina Sluis). We might not need the specificity of the photograph 'Thinking Photography' presumes, but we do need its rigorous critical thinking. What are its legacies? How can we reread it today in our supposedly post-ideological times? What are the implications for photography education, which increasingly emphasises 'professionalisation' – gearing one up as an agent of/for cultural production? In such a space, critical theory is deprived of its agenda.

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[5] 'Fiction with footnotes': Writing art history as literary practice

Jaś Elsner's description of art-historical writing as ekphrasis plants the practice firmly in the purview of poetry, literature or fiction, though be it, in his words, 'fiction with footnotes'. A similar propinquity between the creative work of the artist and that of the historian has been noted, among others, by Boris Groys, Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes and Hayden White, who have indicated that far from being ignobled by the fiction tag, the discipline is perhaps ennobled to deliver on the irreducible multiplicity of its 'objects' which hitherto sat uneasily with a scientific pursuit of linearity, resolution and teleological determination that also treats writing as a neutral expedient. Yet art historians seem reticent to embrace their literary selves as though it is safer on the side of the putative objectivity of language.

The aim of the session is to develop the characteristics of art-historical writing as a practice that necessarily not only negotiates the boundary of visual and verbal, but also manifests a literary fiction produced in the discursive framing of knowledge and meaning-making about artefacts, subjects, processes and their historic contexts. The session invites theoretical and philosophical approaches, as well as case studies, to writing as an epistemic practice of art-historical research. Conceptualisations of art history's writing practice in view of fact, fiction and knowledge production, and critical readings of art history as Wissenschaft will help in framing the discipline as a practice that not only has to contend with political, institutional and ideological demands but also those of writing itself.

Please email your paper proposals direct to the session convenor: Tilo Reifenstein (t.reifenstein@m-mu.ac.uk) by 5 Nov 2018. Provide a title and abstract (250 words maximum) for a 25-minute paper, your name and institutional affiliation (if any). Please make sure the title is concise and reflects the contents of the paper because it will appear online, in social media and in the printed programme. You will receive an acknowledgement of receipt of your submission within two weeks from the session convenor.

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About the Conference:

The Association for Art History's Annual Conference showcases current research and critical debate about art history and visual culture. It takes place over 3 days throughout the UK, bringing together current research and critical debate about art, art history and visual culture.

The Annual conference is an opportunity to keep up to date with emerging research, hear leading keynotes, broaden networks and exchange ideas. It attracts over 500 delegates, speakers and publishers each year. Members of the Association for Art History get reduced conference rates.

Reference:

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