Art, Classicism, and Discourse, from 1755 to Today (Leeds, 15–16 Nov 19)

Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, Feb 01, 2019
Deadline: Apr 8, 2019

Melissa Gustin

ORDER Art, Classicism, and Discourse, from 1755 to Today

Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, United Kingdom
15-16 November 2019

In 1851 the Jury for Sculpture at the Great Exhibition shared their criteria for works of art in their class:
“They have looked for originality of invention, more or less happily expressed in that style which has for twenty-three centuries been the wonder of every civilised people, and the standard of excellence to which artists of the highest order have endeavoured to attain.”

In so many words, the esteemed gentlemen of the Jury (and they were all gentlemen) demanded of their sculptors one thing - classicism, or the antique. Fewer than a hundred years earlier, Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s writings on the art of the ancient world had promoted a systematic, ordered idea of the progress of art; less than a hundred years later, the aftermath of World War I caused artists to invoke a return to order across Europe - a return to classicism, stability, and the simplicity of antiquity. Today, the classics, classicism, and antiquity are still hotly contested visual, literary and cultural forms and norms.

But what is ordered about ‘classicism’? Who benefits from an ordered, stable canon of classicism in art and literature? Is classicism, in art, architecture, archaeology and academia truly the realm of the dead white men (to borrow from the title of Donna Zuckerberg’s 2018 book, Not All Dead White Men)? This conference seeks to challenge, reassess, and provoke discussion on the position of ‘classicism’ in art following Winckelmann’s seminal text on the topic in 1755 through to the present day. Winckelmann’s ordered, teleological histories of art have been thrown into disarray by 265 years of new archaeological discoveries; every generation develops its own ‘classic’ and its own canon. Technologies of communication, dissemination, modification, and reproduction offer artists and academics new media for their engagement with classicism, art, and the world; previously unrepresented populations and individuals have more access to academia, art, and classics than ever before, but not without opposition.

Responding to recent publications, exhibitions, and discussions in art history, classics, and contemporary society and politics, this conference seeks to interrogate classicisms in art (broadly conceived on both fronts). This event follows recent projects like the Classical Now exhibition at

King's College London (2017/18), Rodin and the Art of Ancient Greece at the British Museum (2018), and scholarship on the use of antiquity in contemporary discourse. We will not look to construct a new order or return to an old, but to challenge, explore, and activate new discussions on the use, abuse, and reuse of 'classicism' through history and today. Furthermore, in a historic moment of increased fascism and nationalism, this conference offers an opportunity to publicly interrogate the role classics, classicism, and the reception of antiquity in art has had in upholding oppressive power structures. This event will be held alongside a Henry Moore Institute retrospective exhibition of the work of Edward Allington (1951-2017), an exhibition that will consider the creative engagement of Allington with the cultures of classicism.

Within this framework we invite submissions of 250-300 words from scholars and artists at every career level for papers on topics involving classicism and art from 1755 to today. Preference will be given to papers that highlight or focus on sculptural material, with a broad definition of 'sculpture'. Suggested themes include, but are by no means limited to:

- Gendered uses of classicism in art
- Queer classicisms
- Non-Western classicisms
- Contemporary art practice and uses of 'classicism'
- Problematic or challenging 'classical' objects
- Canon and canonising
- The classical/anti-classical and politics
- Nationalism, internationalism and empire
- Narrative, title and text as ordering principles

Please send abstracts and a brief bio to Kirstie Gregory (kirstie.gregory@henry-moore.org) and Dr Melissa Gustin (mlg519@york.ac.uk) by 8 April 2019.

A postgraduate/early career scholar workshop will precede the conference on the morning of Friday 15 November offering PGR/ECRs working in any discipline on issues of classicism, canon, and antiquity the opportunity to meet their peers and foster new networks. The workshop will invite delegates to give short, informal presentations about their work, offer feedback to their peers, and make connections before attending the conference. Postgraduate students are welcome to submit abstracts for the conference as well as participating in the workshop.

Reference:

CFP: Art, Classicism, and Discourse, from 1755 to Today (Leeds, 15-16 Nov 19). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 4, 2019 (accessed Oct 31, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/20091>.