

The Censer. A Comparative Approach (Bern, 7–8 Jun 19)

Bern, Jun 7–08, 2019

Registration deadline: Jun 1, 2019

Beate Fricke

The Censer. A Comparative Approach

The burning of incense is one of the most pervasive religious practices today and throughout history. The fragrant smoke filling the air can be witnessed in any tradition, whether polytheistic or monotheistic, whether in the Ancient Near East, Modern US, or Medieval Europe. Censers are ubiquitous among religious paraphernalia, and on a truly global scale. Surprisingly, however, little scholarly attention has been given to censers and the rituals they facilitate.

In this project we propose to explore these commonly used yet seldom studied objects from a comparative perspective. This investigation entails consideration of the material fabrication of censers themselves and their subsequent significations, as well as the role of the incense itself as it vaporizes in the course of religious ceremonies. By comparing we aim to unveil resemblances and differences across various religions that at the same time can give evidence to the particularities of a specific tradition. Through these objects we also hope to interrogate dominant narratives in Art History defined by exclusive categories like “the era of art” or by retrospectively defined periods or artistic developments aligned with dynasties.

Centering on the censer thus not only places the object in a constellation of other religious artefacts, but also relocates the importance of rituals that have long been placed at the margins of the study of religion, art, and ritual. Emerging from this, we hope, is a better grasp of the role of sensorial elements in the fostering of the devotional practices of world religions.

Acknowledging the need for an interdisciplinary approach to the profound questions provoked by the censer as object and as site, the project aims to unite scholars from different fields of study in an exploration of the censer and its materiality, ontology, and presence.

Organization: Beate Fricke and Ittai Weinryb

Friday, June 7th, 2019 seminar room 124, Mittelstrasse 43

9.00 - 9.15 Beate Fricke, Bern

Syrian Censers – Opening Horizons

9.15 - 9.30 Ittai Weinryb, New York

Holy Smoke: Posing Questions to Art Historians

9.30 - 10.15 Milette Gaifmann, New Haven

The Incense Burner in Classical Art

10.15 - 11.00 Yao Ning, Florence/Berlin/London

Visualizing the Smoke: Chinese Incense Burner in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) Periods

11.00 Coffee break

11.30 – 12.15 James Doyle, New York

Burning, Godliness, and Sacrifice in Classic Maya Art

12.15 – 13.00 Francesco De Angelis, New York

On Smoke and Balance: Incense-Burners and Ponderation in Etruria

Saturday, June 8th, 2019 seminar room no. 124, Mittelstrasse 43

9.30 – 10.15 Beatrice Caseau, Paris

Shapes and functions of incense burners (Levant and Byzantium)

10.15 – 11.00 Margret Graves, Bloomington

The Gävle Incense Burner: Dense Materiality of an Ambulatory Artefact

11.00 Coffee break

11.30 -12.15 Nathan S. Dennis, San Francisco

Vessels of Holy Fire: The Censer and the Womb of the Mother of God in Early Byzantine and Coptic Devotion

12.15 – 13.00 Nina Macaraig, Riverside

Heavenly Fragrance from Florence to Istanbul: A Comparative Study of Two Early Modern Censers

15.00 - 15.45 Allison Stielau, London

In Chains: Energy, Interconnectivity, and the Physics of Censers

15.45 -16.30 Aden Kumler, Chicago

The Time of the Late Medieval European Censer

16.30 Coffee break

17.00 – 17.30 Final Discussion

Reference:

CONF: The Censer. A Comparative Approach (Bern, 7-8 Jun 19). In: ArtHist.net, Apr 6, 2019 (accessed Apr 6, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/20571>>.