

## Relics and the Arts between Europe and America (Bogotá, 8–12 Jun 20)

Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá /Sede Caribe, Cartagena de Indias, Jun 8–12, 2020

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### Relics and the Arts between Europe and America: Debating Shared Histories

This international conference aims to explore art historical issues regarding relics and reliquaries in the early modern period in the Iberian world. By bringing together papers that deal both with the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America, we also wish to provide a forum for wider discussion and debate regarding the presumed 'shared histories' of these territories as far as concerns relics and reliquaries, objects which are as peculiar as they are inextricably tied to the Catholic societies of this age. The conference focuses on four thematic units, described below.

#### 1. Relics and Relic-Images

In the last decades, the historiography of art and religion in the Spanish American viceroyalties has seen a considerable rise in studies of miraculous images, many of which were endowed with a special status similar to that of relics. In fact, they are sometimes referred to as 'relic-images', the most obvious example being the Virgin of Guadalupe of Mexico. On the other hand, relics and the art they generated, as well as the concomitant process of the construction of local identity usually associated with religious practice, belief and material culture, have been far less explored for the Spanish American viceroyalties. Consequently, it is often believed that relics were less important in the American continent than in Europe and Spain. This session invites debate about this matter in order to better understand the nature of these two types of objects –relics and images– and how they relate to each other. Is this a historiographical, constructed difference? Or, are there concrete differences between the history of relics and relic-images in the Spanish empire depending on which side of the Atlantic one analyzes? Are the differences owed to specific local, geographic and historical conditions? To what extent did these two kinds of cult objects have different functions and could relics generate a sense of local identity just as miracle-working images?

#### 2. Mapping Circulation

Relics constitute an ideal object for the study of circulation and globalization of the modern era. Relics were imported to the Spanish viceroyalties early on in the evangelization history of the American continent in order to sacralize the territory and favor the expansion of Christianity. In this way, they constitute a primary and early material nexus between the Old and the New Worlds. Thereafter and throughout the viceregal period, there was a continuous flow of relics and reliquaries from Spain and Rome to Latin America. Even though some of these episodes are well known (such as the shipment of relics from the Roman catacombs to the city of Mexico through

Jesuit intervention in the late 16th century), in general there are not many studies on the shipment of relics to the viceroyalties. The situation for the history of Iberian Spain is similar, and there is a need to further map the circulation of relics for this geography as well. Although it was common for relics to circulate as gifts and donations, there is evidence that they were also commercialized and that several agents as well as artists (such as those specializing in wax processes) participated in their assemblage and creation. In this session, we invite papers on all aspects related to circulation. We are interested not only in the circulation of relics from Europe to America but also in the flow in the reverse direction (from Latin America to Europe), as well as between territories within the Spanish American viceroyalties themselves (for example, between frontier regions and religious urban centers).

### 3. Contested Relics: Orthodoxy / Heterodoxy

As regards art history, relics and especially their reliquaries have often been considered in an unproblematic manner, as simply artistic objects. In this session, we seek to explore their more heterodox potential, including cases in which the production of relics raised controversy and was contested. As is well known, the falsification of relics was a fairly common practice in the early modern period. Moreover, relics could be received with criticism not only from Lutherans, but also from Catholics themselves. Sometimes these criticisms were related to rivalries between religious orders or cities and, in a wider sense, they could also involve relations between nations and empires. In some areas of the Spanish viceroyalties, relics also invite anthropological analysis, especially if one considers them as instruments of 'frontier' dynamics. In this context, relics could be powerful objects, on the one hand endowed with the capacity of facilitating conversion but, on the other, open to local interpretations, misunderstandings, or reformulations. What kind of controversies existed regarding relics in the Spanish monarchy? Which of these were the result of local conditions and different geographies and which belong to the universal problems of the Catholic Church in the context of the Counter Reformation?

### 4. Reliquaries and Artistic Idioms

The study of reliquaries has, until recently, occupied the margins of art historical inquiry with these objects often relegated to the arena of the 'decorative arts' and considered independently from the artistic production of painting, sculpture and architecture. This session seeks papers that consider the reliquary as an artefact that is capable of transcending traditional art historical classification. Given the variety of forms that reliquaries adopted, the diversity of materials and techniques employed in their composition, and their portability, reliquaries often shared spaces with other works of art. In fact, some of these were expressly created to activate the specific messages of the relics and their reliquaries by connecting presence with memory and narration. In this session, we seek papers that deal with the reliquary beyond itself (and consequently, beyond description and documentation), as well as novel interpretations of the reliquary as object. How are we to understand the design of reliquaries and the degree of participation of the artist? To what extent was the artist (and patron) able to generate an object that could condition the kinds of ceremonies and usages associated with these objects?

### Instructions for submissions

Please submit a one to two page abstract, noting its corresponding session, along with an abbreviated CV. All papers must present original and unpublished research. Materials should be sent by email to [reliquiasuniandes2020@gmail.com](mailto:reliquiasuniandes2020@gmail.com) by September 30, 2019. Acceptance of papers will be

notified by October 31. Conference participants will have 25 minutes to present their research at the conference. Some of the papers may be published after the event, following an editorial process and external peer review.

#### Additional logistical information

This conference is one of the activities planned as part of the nationally funded Spanish research group HAR2017-82713P 'Spolia Sancta. Fragmentos y envolturas de sacralidad entre el Viejo y el Nuevo Mundo', co-directed by Prof. Luisa Elena Alcalá and Prof. Juan Luis González García (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid), and which includes the collaboration of other Spanish, European and Latin American scholars. The conference itself is co-organized by the directors of the above mentioned project and Dr. Patricia Zalamea, Professor of the Department of Art History and Dean of the School of Arts and Humanities of the Universidad de los Andes (Bogotá).

The conference organization is unable to cover the costs of transportation and hotels for speakers. As part of the conference program, several visits to museums and cultural institutions will be organized as workshop activities.

#### Reference:

CFP: Relics and the Arts between Europe and America (Bogotá, 8-12 Jun 20). In: Arthist.net, Sep 4, 2019 (accessed Aug 15, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/21412>>.