

Paintings, Peepshows, and Porcupies (San Marino CA, 17–18 Sep 21)

Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, CA, Sep 17–18, 2021

Deadline: Apr 1, 2020

Catherine Roach

Call for Papers

Paintings, Peepshows, and Porcupines:

Exhibitions in London, 1775–1851

Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California

September 17–18, 2021

Co-convenors:

Jordan Bear (University of Toronto)

Catherine Roach (Virginia Commonwealth University)

In 1820, the Romantic painter Théodore Géricault sent his now-famous image of a shipwreck, *The Raft of the Medusa*, by boat to London. There, it was shown at Bullock's Egyptian Hall, a display space that also featured attractions as varied as live reindeer and Napoleon's carriage, captured at Waterloo. This well-known episode was not an aberration or a Romantic eccentricity; it was, quite simply, business as usual. In many nineteenth-century cities, exhibiting outside of official art venues was not uncommon, nor was it necessarily an act of rebellion. Recent scholarship has challenged preconceptions about audience and cultural hierarchy in relation to Géricault's *Raft*, but we are only beginning to understand the role of artworks within a broader culture of display.

This conference will assemble an international group of distinguished scholars to rethink some of our fundamental assumptions about exhibitions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It will focus on London as the center of an exhibitionary culture and as a hub of empire. It will consider a vibrant period of this culture, roughly from the opening in 1775 of the Leverian Museum, or *Holophusikon*, brimming with artifacts from Captain Cook's voyages, to the staging in 1851 of the Great Exhibition, which inaugurated a new age of international shows.

The protagonist of many of the most influential art historical studies of recent decades has been the figure of the spectator, who has brought with her a revitalized engagement with the surprisingly varied modes of the reception of works of art. And while the foregrounding of the experience of the spectator, or "beholder," or "observer," has broadened the compass of the discipline considerably, we still hold a relatively orthodox view of the kinds of venues, events, and display practices that are deemed worthy of inquiry. Even as art historians have valorized the expressive possibili-

ties of alternative exhibition spaces so central to avant-garde identity, the appearance of paintings in the precincts of commercial entertainment has, for many years, been consigned to a position of marginal curiosity in the history of art. Exhibition-makers are often characterized as either renegades or hucksters—as if aesthetically daring artists were not part of the market, or as if commercial displays could not contain works of aesthetic or cultural merit. Both the sheen of avant-garde rebellion and the tarnish of lucre continue to color approaches to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century displays.

Even the most adventurous of recent studies have not fully accounted for the most singular feature of the display of these works of art in the first decades of the century: their embeddedness in an exhibitionary landscape consisting of the richest imaginable array of artifacts, environments, and living creatures. Imperialist expansion and the need to justify it brought an increasingly wide range of objects to European urban centers. Moreover, these diverse displays were consumed in concert. They were part of a round of seasonal entertainments that might include viewing oil paintings in the morning and taxidermy in the afternoon—or viewing examples of both at a single venue. To recapture this context, talks given at this event will consider relationships among venues or trace the circulation of objects and visitors among multiple sites of display.

Speakers will include:

Ann Bermingham (University of California, Santa Barbara)

Rosie Dias (University of Warwick)

Meredith Gamer (Columbia University)

Mark Hallett (Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art)

John Plunkett (University of Exeter)

We are now seeking additional speakers to join this roster. Early career scholars and scholars from underrepresented groups are especially encouraged to apply.

We anticipate that papers will be 35–40 minutes in length, and will be presented to the Huntington's larger scholarly community. The generous support of the Huntington's Research Department will cover economy airfare, hotel accommodation, and incidental transport expenses for speakers.

To apply, please send an abstract of 250 words and a CV to:
huntingtonconference2021@gmail.com

Deadline for applications: April 1, 2020

Reference:

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