

Modernist Murals Study Day and Symposium (Bloomington, 15–16 Nov 20)

Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, USA, Nov 15–16, 2020

Deadline: May 15, 2020

Jennifer McComas, Indiana University Art Museum

Several significant twentieth-century murals—including Thomas Hart Benton's 1933 mural cycle on the history of Indiana—grace the campus of Indiana University in Bloomington, itself a thriving hub of public art. The university's Eskenazi Museum of Art is home to modernist painter Stuart Davis's groundbreaking 1938 mural, "Swing Landscape." Commissioned for the Williamsburg Housing Project in Brooklyn, New York, under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project, "Swing Landscape" has been described as one of the most important examples of twentieth-century American painting. Yet its origins within a public art commission have been largely overlooked in the literature. From 3 September through 20 December 2020, the Eskenazi Museum will mount "Swing Landscape: Stuart Davis and the Modernist Mural," the first exhibition to reassess the mural as a work of public art, fully situating it within its historical, political, and aesthetic milieu. Further, the exhibition will shed new light on the ambitious program of modernist murals envisioned for the Williamsburg Houses and on the phenomenon of abstract mural painting in the 1930s.

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Eskenazi Museum is convening a scholarly study day and symposium to advance research on the aesthetic, cultural, and political aspects of murals and to facilitate discussion between established and emerging scholars and curators working on modernist public art.

Proposals are sought from advanced graduate students and emerging and mid-career scholars and curators for short (circa 20 minutes) presentations featuring new research on murals and adjacent media (such as mosaics and stained glass), especially those produced between the 1920s and the 1960s. Presentations focusing on Stuart Davis as a muralist, on the Williamsburg Housing Project murals, and on the WPA murals are particularly encouraged. Other possible topics might include international/transatlantic connections between muralists; the relationship of modernist painting and architecture; patrons and audiences; political or propagandistic uses of murals and public art; and the influence of modernist murals on public art today. Case studies focusing on exhibitions or conservation issues are also welcome.

Invited presenters will have the opportunity to participate in a private tour of the exhibition, a roundtable discussion on the current role of modernist murals in exhibitions and educational contexts, and possibly a tour of murals on the Indiana University campus. All other presentations will be open to the public.

By 15 May 2020, please send a 300-word abstract and your CV to Jennifer McComas, Curator of European and American Art at the Eskenazi Museum of Art, at jmccomas@indiana.edu. Notifications of decisions will be sent by mid-June. Modest travel stipends may be available for invited participants.

Reference:

CFP: Modernist Murals Study Day and Symposium (Bloomington, 15-16 Nov 20). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 20, 2020 (accessed Jul 2, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/22887>>.