

Displays/Representations: UK in Int. Exhibitions (Aix-en-Provence, 28-29 Jun 12)

Maison méditerranéenne des sciences de l'homme, Aix-en-Provence, France, Jun 28–29, 2012
Deadline: Nov 30, 2011

Guillaume Evrard

Abstract:

160 years after the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, and 60 years after the Festival of Britain, this international conference aims at scrutinizing displays and representations of the UK in international exhibitions. Creating an opportunity for interdisciplinary exchanges and discussions for researchers (doctoral, post-doc, and senior) and practitioners whose enquiry builds upon elements of British culture and history of international exhibitions is another goal of this conference project.

Call for proposals:

International exhibitions have been an object of research in very diverse disciplinary fields. This conference is meant to serve as an opportunity to support exchanges of expertise and encourage discussions between researchers and practitioners whose work centres on elements of British culture and the history of international exhibitions.

The range of this call for proposals is intentionally as welcoming as possible, inviting a diverse range of material and disciplinary approaches: history of art, of architecture, of graphics, of visual culture, of gender, social and regional studies. Considering the location for the conference, international exhibitions which took place near the Mediterranean are of special interest (such as Barcelona 1888, Turin 1902, Milan 1906, Seville 1929-30, Seville 1992, Lisbon 1998, and Saragossa 2008). Furthermore, the relation between the national question (England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland) within the United Kingdom itself and displays and representations of the United Kingdom in exhibitions is also worth considering. Participants may come from humanities and social sciences, from basic and applied research, and be affiliated with academic, heritage-based, or business-based organisations.

The 2010 Shanghai Universal Exhibition ended, unsurprisingly, on a massive success in terms of visitor figures. Members of the international community and global companies rushed from all corners to feature in good position in the environment of this ephemeral showcase put together to quench the curiosity of an audience eager to consume and discover the world.

In these early years of the 21st century, though, the participation of sovereign countries to such an event prompts more than ever all sorts of questions. The increasing number of available media and the growing circulation of information across the world may be a challenge for both state and

entrepreneurial entities in their will to create and communicate a consistent narrative. Meanwhile, the public is more and more able to form an autonomous opinion on various questions. Might this enormous institutional investment, both physical and intellectual, be driven by precisely the one-of-a-kind nature of this type of gathering?

In 2010, Greek-British architect Katerina Dionysopoulou explained about the UK building she had contributed to for the Shanghai Exhibition: 'The biggest challenge of the project was to create a pavilion that the government would be happy to use as a platform to communicate how amazing the UK is without making it a straightforward advertisement. At the same time, we were trying to build an object that had never been built.'

This emphasises several themes this conference is interested in: communication and political appropriation of the event, display and representation of a country throughout the event, and a consideration of technical and technological innovation.

In a context of international competition and flamboyance, with a public both international and local, it is inevitable that the communication issue should arise: who is a national representation for? The other, the foreigner, the world? Or for oneself, one's own nationals?

More broadly, there is the question of the motivation: why does one wish to take part in the UK representation in international exhibitions? And perhaps, on the contrary, why would one shun the opportunity?

These questions on institutional motivations for displays and representations find their counterpart in questions on individual motivation for taking part in this exceptional communication setting that international exhibitions have been: A thirst for knowledge? Curiosity? A desire to experience the event and subsequently to share the experience? Ultimately what are the results from the point of view of the public?

National representation, technology, and relation to history: technical questions are also inevitable. Historically, exhibitions are the place to become familiar with progress and modernity. However, in the days of globalisation and instant communication, the display of innovation and technical or technological 'revolution' may seem less in the spotlight than it used to be several decades ago. Proposals may explore the way relations between education and entertainment of visitors as well as promotion and teaching have been negotiated in presentations of the UK.

Considering the UK's significant colonial history, proposals may reflect on the relations between the UK and colonial power in terms of display and representation in exhibitions. They could thus look at issues of colonial action, and then decolonisation and the post-colonial era: Why? How? To what ends?

Proposals may be diachronic, to focus on short or long term trends, or synchronic, focussing on case studies illustrating wider concepts or trends particularly significant in the intellectual context of exhibitions and beyond in selected disciplinary fields.

Comparative approaches are welcome, especially to emphasize specificities – or shared features – which have characterised UK presentations in exhibitions.

The conference organizing committee plans to produce a publication presenting a selection of

contributions in a cohesive editorial project. As such, proposals drawing on original, unpublished research are particularly welcome.

Proposals for papers of 20 minutes, in English or in French, should include a title and a 300-word abstract. Proposals should in particular indicate how they fit into one or more of the areas detailed above, give some details on sources from which the proposal stems, and summarize the thesis of the contribution.

Paper proposals are to be sent to both Eve Roy (melle_roy [at] yahoo [dot] fr) and Guillaume Evrard (g.evrard [at] ed [dot] ac [dot] uk) before 30 November 2011.

This conference is organized by GEIAB (Groupe d'études interdisciplinaires en arts britanniques, Paris), in collaboration with UMR TELEMM (Université Aix-Marseille 1) and HICSA (Université Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne).

Participants should plan to be responsible for their transport and accommodation expenses.

Organizing committee: Guillaume Evrard, Gabriel Gee, Sophie Orlando, Eve Roy.

Scientific committee: Mr. Jean-Lucien Bonillo, Ms Rossella Froissart, Mr Paul Greenhalg, Mr Jean-Marie Guillon, Mr Claude Massu, Mr Simon Texier, Ms Sabine Wieber.

The organizing committee will get in touch with all authors of paper proposals in December 2011.

www.geiab.org

Reference:

CFP: Displays/Representations: UK in Int. Exhibitions (Aix-en-Provence, 28-29 Jun 12). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 22, 2011 (accessed Jan 9, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/2299>>.