

Art History, Postcolonialism, and the Global Turn (25 Sep–23 Oct 20)

Rhode Island School of Design & Brown University, Sep 25–Oct 23, 2020

Joshua I. Cohen

Art History, Postcolonialism, and the Global Turn - Online conference, film screening, and conversation

As attention turns increasingly toward the “global” in art history, has postcolonialism fallen into obsolescence? Although touted as liberating, does the new “global” dispensation mark a rupture with history? What shall become of the generative critical theory that emerged in the 1980s and ‘90s, which partly grew out of reflections on anticolonial movements and post-independence nation-building? At best, global art history signals a germane awareness of “post-postcolonial” conditions precipitated by the accelerating globalization of finance capitalism. But would proponents of global contemporary art rather applaud putatively post-national freedoms than reckon with globalization’s deep disadvantages, while jettisoning the postcolonial as an allegedly outmoded product of elite theory?

This conference asks whether, or to what degree, postcolonial discourses stand to be recuperated and revised in 21st-century art history, architectural history, visual studies, and art criticism. In cases where political alliances have frayed and nascent national governments foundered, radical politics have sometimes given way to disillusionment, while transnationalism, hybridity, and self-fashioning settle in as new norms. For some in the Global South, “postcolonial” may indeed appear misleading as an overall designation. Nevertheless, what could be the implications of moving past postcolonialism as we arguably celebrate a cosmopolitan world that has yet to be fully realized? With neoliberalism giving rise to what art historian Anthony Gardner has called “a resurgent focus on North Atlantic relations,” what would be the cost of letting the postcolonial slip away?

In other words, what does the early 21st-century—so distant from the heyday of anticolonialism associated with Third World independence and liberation movements—hold for the practices and ambitions of artists, scholars, and critics? How have contemporary artists accommodated and/or resisted the demands of the global art world? What have the recent shifts in discourse meant—or what could they mean—for scholarly and curatorial (re)readings of chronologically staggered periods of culture clash and decolonization, including the possibilities, and failures of each moment? How might an ongoing or renewed “postcolonial” artistic output exceed the confines of galleries, biennials, art fairs, and museums? Do new interests in the “global” inevitably come at the expense of the postcolonial? Are the phenomena in question truly taking place on a global scale? Have scholars and artists from the Global South explored different terms and frameworks to structure their pursuits? To what extent are political limitations determined by working relationships with

art institutions and their particular forms of patronage?

Registration required; to register, please visit <https://pococonf.risd.edu>

Schedule:

PANEL 1

September 25, 2020 – 11 AM EST

Tammer El-Sheikh (York University)

"What Does Art History Have to Say about a Lebanese Sasquatch?: Form, Value and Negation in the Decolonial Work of Edward Said and Amanda Boulos"

Sonal Khullar (University of Pennsylvania)

"In Light of Octavio Paz"

FILM SCREENING

October 2–9, 2020: Register online.

Un-documented: Unlearning Imperial Plunder, written and directed by Ariella Aïsha Azoulay

PANEL 2

October 9, 2020 – 11 AM EST

Diana Martinez (Tufts University)

"Architecture in Triple Person: National Character between Humanism and Ethnology in Pre-Post-Colonial Philippines"

Jennifer Bajorek (Hampshire College)

"Mediterraneans on every corner"

Anthony Gardner (Oxford University)

"Doing Art History in the 'New Normal'"

FILM CONVERSATION

October 10, 2020 – 11 AM EST

Ariella Aïsha Azoulay in conversation with Vazira Zamindar (Brown) and Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa (RISD)

PANEL 3

October 23, 2020 – 11 AM EST

Ijlal Muzaffar (RISD)

"Counting Quality"

Alexander Alberro (Barnard College / Columbia University)

"Coloniality, Decoloniality, and 'The Potosí Principle' in the Twenty-first Century"

Detailed schedule, speaker bios, paper abstracts, and registration: <https://pococonf.risd.edu>

Organizers: Foad Torshizi (RISD), Joshua I. Cohen (CCNY), and Vazira Zamindar (Brown).

Sponsors: RISD Division of Liberal Arts; RISD Associate Provost for Social Equity and Inclusion; RISD Office of the Provost; RISD Division of Liberal Arts, MA Program in Global Arts and Cultures; Brown University, Center for Contemporary South Asia; RISD Global; Brown University, Art History from the South; Brown University, Department of History; Brown University, Department of History of Art and Architecture; Brown University, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies; Brown University, Brown Arts Initiative; Brown University, Decolonial Collective on Migration of Objects and People.

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Website: <https://pococonf.risd.edu>

Reference:

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