# Mediating the Arctic and the North (online 28-29 Jan 21)

Jan 28–29, 2021
Registration deadline: Jan 21, 2021

Linn Burchert, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin

Mediating the Arctic and the North. Contexts, Agents, Distribution
A Digital Collaborative Workshop organized by the Humboldt University (Department of Art and Visual History) and the research group WONA (Worlding Northern Art) at University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway (Department of Language and Culture)

For centuries, the "Arctic" and the "North" have served as projection screens for 'Western' imaginations. Within its long history of exploration and exploitation, the Arctic was constructed as white, sublime and untouched, as well as dark, frozen and terrifying. Particularly with the onset of the industrial revolution, the development of modern science and heightened imperialist expansion, the Arctic was not exempt from becoming a colonized territory. Seen as largely uncharted from a Western perspective, it became a playground for heroic deeds and scientific endeavors, resource exploitation and the exertion of political influences. Visual and literary representations played no minor role in constructing an image of the Arctic as one of the last places on earth to be explored and scientifically examined, while simultaneously advocating the frozen North as a wild, unknown and non-civilized territory. Contemporaneous colonial and racial discourses fed well into expansionist and interest-driven politics, with visual imagery making a significant contribution to justifying the colonization and exploitation of land and of its indigenous peoples. Nowadays, in the face of global warming, the Arctic has moved into the center of scientific, socio-political and economic discussions yet again, and has – at the same time – given rise to an increased production and distribution of scientific, popular and artistic images in the media and in the arts.
The workshop's aim is to shed light on the persistence and deconstruction of stereotypical representations of the "Arctic" and the "North" with a focus on two distinctive periods: Firstly, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, often characterized as the grand era of Polar exploration. Secondly our contemporary present, in which the Arctic not only serves as a magnifying glass for the (visual) consequences of climate change, political and economic interests, but also demands reflection on the historical and contemporary violations of indigenous rights and territories deriving from colonial expansion. While awareness and reconciliation are important elements in such a reflection, it is crucial to see the region's indigenous inhabitants – human and non-human – as equal agents.
One of the seminar's focuses will be on visual representation via photography. As a typical medium of choice it serves the representation of the Arctic according to various purposes: as a (scientific) document, as a political instrument and as an artistic medium. It investigates the specific conditions of images in history and the present, both technically and ideologically: One key aspect

here is the creation and utilisation of expedition and documentary photography since the late 19th century up until today. The material is critically looked upon by questioning who represents how, whom and what, when, and to what ends. Which goals, for instance, did documentary photography serve in nation-building discourses of the early 20th century, who were the agents, and where were these particular images distributed? Other contributions shed light on contemporary, artistic multi- and various media approaches on and from the Arctic. In this context the question arises as to how different media confirm, reflect or subvert specific stereotypes and discourses connected to the Arctic and the North. Here it will be vital to reflect on discourses connected to the indigenous populations of the North themselves and discuss their agency, or the lack thereof. The specific contexts of creation, publication, and mediation of various visual media dealing with and emerging from the Arctic and the North are emphasized in order to stress the institutional and contextual conditions of images and their mediation.

Thursday, 28 January 2021, 14:00-17:00
14:00-14.15: Welcome and Introduction

PLACE, IDENTITY AND AFFECT IN PHOTOGRAPHY (Chair: Hanne Hammer Stien, Tromsø)
14:15-14:35: Hanna Horsberg Hansen (Tromsø): Emilie Demant Hatt's Photographs in With the Lapps in the High Mountains. Between Evidence and Affect
14:35-14:55: Ingeborg Høvik (Tromsø): Negotiating Meaning: John Møller’s Photographs in Early Twentieth-century Scandinavian Literature
14:55-15:15: Discussion

PHOTOGRAPHY AND EXTRACTION (Chair: Eva Ehninger, Berlin)
15:45-16:05: Elisaveta Dvorakk (Berlin): Imaging Sweden in the Swiss Illustrated Press 1937. Annemarie Schwarzenbach’s Photography and the Notion of the Documentary
16:05-16:25: Elin Haugdal (Tromsø): Black Arctic: Coal Mining in Photography
16:25-17:00: Discussion

Friday, 29 January 2021, 10:00-14:00
10:00-10:05: Short welcome
10:05-10:25: Mette Tronvoll (Oslo) on her Svalbard Series. Artist Presentation
10:25-10:45: Discussion (Chair: Stephanie von Spreter)

NEGOTIATING PAST AND PRESENT (Chair: Anne Hemkendreis, Greifswald/Freiburg)
10:45-11:05: Maike Teubner (Nuremberg): Re-photographing the Arctic. Tyrone Martinsson’s Photo Project about Svalbard’s Glaciers
11:05-11:25: Stephanie von Spreter (Tromsø): Shifting Focus. From Representation to Re-presentation and Materiality: Reading the Photographic Works of Pia Arke (1958-2007)
11:25-11:45: Discussion

Break

CONTEMPORARY EXHIBITION POLITICS (Chair: Antje Kempe, Greifswald)
12:30-12:50: Hanne Hammer Stien (Tromsø): Negotiation and Indigenization – Iver Jåks’s Work as an Exhibition Designer
12:50-13:10: Linn Burchert (Berlin): Art and Political Event. The Arctic at Global Climate Summits

13:10-14:00: Discussion / Rounding off

ORGANIZATION AND REGISTRATION
Linn Burchert (Humboldt University Berlin, Department of Modern Art History, Prof. Dr. Eva Ehninger)
Stephanie von Spreter (University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway, Project: Worlding Northern Art (WONA))
supported by Prof. Dr. Marie-Theres Federhofer (Humboldt University Berlin, Henrik Steffens Professor, Department of Northern European Studies)

The workshop will take place online via Zoom. If you would like to participate please send an e-mail to linn.burchert[at]hu-berlin.de until 21.1.21. Please note that the number of participants is limited and that there are only few places left.

ABSTRACTS AND SPEAKER AVAILABLE HERE: http://www.kunstgeschichte.hu-berlin.de/veranstaltungen/workshop-mediating-the-arctic-and-the-north-contexts-agents-distribution/

Reference:
CONF: Mediating the Arctic and the North (online 28-29 Jan 21). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 15, 2021 (accessed Oct 6, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/24255>.