The Roles of Visual Tropes (28th AAH Ann Conf, Liverpool, 5-8 April 2002)

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CALL FOR PAPERS

The Roles of Visual Tropes in 17th and 18th-Century Engravings of
Colonial Subjects

Session at the 28th Association of Art Historians Annual Conference
(University of Liverpool, 5-8 April 2002)

The twentieth century was overwhelmed with pronouncements on the epochal
cultural transformations to be expected from the advent of photography.
In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the rapidly expanding and
increasingly efficient printmaking industry developed countless
stylisations directed at satisfying the collective desires of the
aristocracy, nouveaux riches, and "contemporary masses." That this
coincided with global European expansionism meant that there was not
only a broader and wealthier purchasing public, but one embroiled in an
intellectual reformation eager to bring "things 'closer' spatially and
humanly." The commercialism of engraving affected its image: the
authority of the object was in direct proportion to its marketability.
What visual tropes can be exhumed from this economy? How were social
modes of perception satisfied? How are these images diachronic?

In the familiar words of Walter Benjamin, "the instant the criterion of
authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total
function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins
to be based on another practice-politics." Yet for centuries, colonial
historians have relied on visual images as evidence in literary
investigations. How could they have overlooked the system of economy on
which mechanical reproduction depended? Branding the doyens of literary
historicism as guilty of having their "eyes wide shut" to the image's
economic, political and thus visual gamesmanship has two purposes. It
forces a general reassessment of established dogma, and it promotes the
revision of colonial history by visual means. What are the

historiographical effects of recognising the visual tropes in seventeenth and eighteenth-century engravings of colonial subjects? How do they impact our perceptions of colonialism's agenda?

Proposals for this session will be accepted until November 25, 2001.

Please send a one-page abstract, including your full name, institutional affiliation, address, title of your proposed paper, and a short curriculum vitae to:

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