

Politickin Art History (Gr St Symp, Santa Barbara 29.4.05)

George Flaherty

POLITICKING ART HISTORY
2005 Graduate Student Symposium
History of Art and Architecture
UC Santa Barbara
Friday, April 29 2005

In 1928, Maurice Weseen, an early scholar of American slang wrote, "Politicking, a coined word that has no recognized standing." A little over 75 years later, when "chatter" determines geopolitical intervention and political candidates embark on "front porch tours," politicking is perhaps not so lowly as to escape our attention any longer.

Politicking technically means to discuss or engage in politics. Since Weseen's slight, however, politicking has taken on a rather negative connotation: partisan machination, pork barrel myopia, and more generally, an official and bureaucratic approach to (ex)change.

But to pin the term down belies its origins in slang, in the fast and loose of the everyday, and continue to privilege idealized transactions between individuals, communities, nations. For example, Jürgen Habermas, as critics have pointed out, failed to consider that raucous, "irrational" conversation rather than reasoned debate contributed to the making of the bourgeois public sphere.

Traditional art history also deals largely in idealized transactions. We have trouble making sense of the informal and personal, let alone the anarchic. Politicking, and its close cousins, gossiping and kibitzing, remain for the most part untheorized. In some ways, this symposium is a critique of art history's artfully constructed public sphere, of its imposed civility on societies.

Politicking can be political, however not all politicking is politics.
Politicking is:

- Criticism shared in passing
- Slips of language that break open meaning
- Friendly and not-so-friendly exchanges

- Pleasure and possibility in the ostensibly extraneous and unstructured
- Sly forms of distraction, meddling, lobbying
- Easy and unrestrained talk or writing, especially about bodies and the social.

The line between politick and impolite is fine but worth tracing, tweaking. Politicking is a critical stance, an upright maneuverability if you will. The call is not just for interdisciplinarity, but for losing our disciplinarity if only temporarily to access broader historical and theoretical debates. We invite graduate students of the history of art and architecture to share recent research and works in progress (20-minute presentation plus Q&A). Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Art and architecture that champions/clamps down on not-so-civil society
- The place of the fragment
- Busy/bodies
- How might we account for less formal transactions between art and beholder, artist and style, art and nation/globe?
- Friendly and not-so-friendly exchanges in the arts/criticism
- Artists/art historians/museums raising a ruckus
- How theories of art and architecture account for the informal, anarchic
- Envisioning a new/supplemental public sphere
- What constitutes evidence, context and rhetoric when politicking
- Methodological and theoretical problems with humor and pleasure
- Gray art markets.

Please e-mail abstracts of no more than 300 words along with your vita (or any questions) to the organizers at the address below by February 28, 2005. Participants will be notified by March 7, with a draft of your presentation due by April 18.

George Flaherty & Summer Cameron
History of Art and Architecture
UC Santa Barbara
Arts 1234
Santa Barbara, CA 93106-7080
gflaherty@umail.ucsb.edu

Reference:

CFP: Politickin Art History (Gr St Symp, Santa Barbara 29.4.05). In: ArtHist.net, Dec 3, 2004 (accessed May 10, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/26849>>.