Slavery in Contemporary Art (Trier, Oct 06)

This is a Call for Papers from the CePog (Centre of Postcolonial and Gender Studie) University Trier

Call for Papers

Slavery in Contemporary Art. Trauma, Theory and Tradition in Visual Culture
An intercultural and interdisciplinary conference hosted by the Centre for Postcolonial and Gender Studies at the University of Trier (October 26-28, 2006)

Submission deadline: March 31, 2006.

Slavery, both in its historical and modern forms, continues to be a matter of undiminished political and social relevance. Since the 1980s there has been an increasing artistic interest in this topic with a number of artists working on the subject of slavery. The significance of their concepts of memory has not only emerged in their call for alternative images of history but also in their reflections and attempts to come to terms with the after-effects of slavery. In spite of a prevailing general interest in slavery, however these works of art and the individual reflections they express have been met with little scholarly attention so far.

This conference is designed to bring together scholars and artists from various disciplines and fields of study, and specifically addresses graduates, post-graduates and junior scholars/ artists. Its aim is to consider visual representations, critiques and revisions of slavery in contemporary art. These can be considered as instances of cultural transformation, denial, and exposure of historical traumas. In this sense, paintings and artifacts are no more illustrations of historical or contemporary events but rather culturally coded aesthetic symptoms. Interpretations of these visually coded symptoms provide insights into the history of mentalities and affects that cannot otherwise be gained. This approach calls for particular theories and methods yet to be formulated, which also take into account more established approaches such as postcolonial and gender studies, media

theory, and discourse analysis.

The conference wants to give an impetus to the formulation of a theory that considers trauma and visual representation from a postcolonial perspective. The aim is to develop a transcultural differentiated paradigm of pictures, which allows for the international interchange of visual cultures of memory. A special focus will be given to critical discussions of psychoanalytic approaches to trauma within the cultural studies - with the objective of checking the colonising impact of such approaches and counteracting their universal application to all manifestations of culture. One question could be whether such approaches are not in and of themselves specific euro-american attempts or strategies of coming to terms with traumatic experiences.

While the conference focuses on slavery, we highly welcome theoretical and methodological contributions from other relevant areas, such as holocaust and genocide studies as well as studies of the aftermath of armed conflicts. We welcome all contributions dealing with visual discourse strategies of memory and repression, projection, metaphorical displacement, and the inversion of meaning.

Presentation topics may include:

* Theoretical and artistic concepts of trauma and visuality

* The impact of traumatic experiences on the formation of body images. What affects and/or bodily experiences do these symptom formations evoke?

* Besides visual symptom formations, what other (performative, verbal or acoustic) traditions do exist, that deal with historical attempts of coming to terms with the trauma of slavery or the (partial) failure of abolitionism? The emphasis should be on mediality under which traumas are being dealt with.

* How does contemporary art criticise traditional visual representations of slavery? In what terms can the processes of decoding and recoding be described?

We invite interdisciplinary contributions from history, literary studies, musicology, cultural studies, history of art, media studies, ethnology, sociology, narratology, psychology, and philosophy as well as from the arts and all adjacent fields. As the conference will be held in English, only English contributions will be considered.

Submission deadline:
Please e-mail your proposals (not exceeding 300 words), your address, and a short bio, by March 31, 2006 to:
Slavery-Conference@web.de

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