

Other Views: Art History in (South) Africa & the Global South (Johannesburg, 12-15 Jan 11)

Jillian Carman

South

Final call for papers: OTHER VIEWS: ART HISTORY IN (SOUTH) AFRICA AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH

A colloquium organised by the South African Visual Arts Historians (SAVAH) under the aegis of the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art (CIHA), University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 12-15 January 2011

The colloquium addresses concerns about the unequal distribution of resources around the globe and challenges from postcolonial societies to the older methods and concepts of Western art history. These challenges have relevance in South Africa, Africa and the Global South, which in this context is a cultural construct rather than a geographic term. It refers to communities and artistic production, throughout history and across nations, which, within the dominant narratives of Western art, have been ignored, marginalised, displaced and appropriated.

Papers are invited that address any of the topics outlined in the panels below. Abstracts, up to 250 words in length, must be submitted by e-mail in English, and must include the author's institutional affiliation and relevant contact details. The final length of individual papers must not exceed 3,000 words, in order to fit into the strict 20 minute time limit per presentation. Abstracts should be sent directly to the panel organisers, copying the Chairperson of SAVAH, Federico Freschi, federico.freschi@wits.ac.za. ABSTRACTS WILL BE ACCEPTED UNTIL 31 JULY 2010.

The Getty Foundation has generously made funding available for travel grants for delegates from Africa, India, South East Asia and South America to attend the colloquium. For more information regarding application procedures and closing dates please contact Federico Freschi, federico.freschi@wits.ac.za, tel. +27 11 717 4611.

1. INTERROGATING WESTERN PARADIGMS

1.1 Modernist primitivism and indigenous modernisms: transnational discourse and local art histories

Convenor: Ruth B. Phillips, Carleton University, ruth_phillips@carleton.ca

During the twentieth century, Indigenous artists in many parts of the world were introduced to Western formats, media, and fine art conventions by Western-trained artists imbued with the modernist admiration for Primitive Art. This panel addresses the complex ways in which these Indigenous artists have negotiated the aesthetic, ideological, and institutional manifestations of modernism and primitivism. By bringing together scholars who study indigenous modernisms in different parts of the world, it establishes a comparative framework in order to reveal, on the one hand, global paths of circulation, networks of communication and common patterns of development, and, on the other, the unique features that characterise iterations of Indigenous modernism in different parts of the world.

Participants are invited to present case studies that reveal the roles played by Western mentors, teachers, and patrons motivated by their admiration for Primitive Art, the strategies Indigenous artists adopted in response to these discourses, and the transformative potential of Indigenous modernisms in relation to 'mainstream' constructs of the modern. They might consider, for example, the roles played by refugees from Nazi Europe and other political exiles in transmitting a specifically European brand of modernist artistic primitivism; the relationships of national liberation movements to the emergence of Indigenous artistic modernisms; transnational artistic influences, not only between European and Indigenous artists, but also between different Indigenous tradition; the ways that the recognition of these patterns lead us to reformulate notions of hybridity, national modernisms, and modernism itself; or the relationships between art forms developed as souvenir productions and modernist fine art.

1.2 Rethinking authenticity in African art

Convenor: Mathias Alubafi, University of the Witwatersrand,
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This study investigates the relationship between art produced and used in Africa before contact with the West, that which was collected during the colonial and postcolonial period and displayed in European and American museums, and that which is produced and used in Africa today. It aims to examine which of these different genres of art found both in Africa and the West is authentic, and why? The purpose is to shift our understanding of authenticity from the previously largely-held Western notion that most works created after the advent of a cash economy and new forms of patronage from missionaries, colonial administrators and more recently, tourists and the new African elite (Kasfir 1994: 90) are inauthentic, to a more inclusive policy of ascribing meaning and authenticity to African art. Discussion on issues related to the creation of, and who creates meaning in, African art is needed to produce a complete inventory of the different types of meanings and their creators, in order to produce fuller empirical concepts, wider knowledge and to address the question of generalisation in African art

studies, as well as the neglect of relevant issues such as the complex nature of African societies and their art, and to give a fuller understanding of the concept of authenticity. Key questions this session will explore include: what is authenticity? What constitutes authentic African art in Africa, and in the West? Who creates meaning for African art and why? How does the meaning and authenticity of art produced and used in traditional religious rituals in Africa differ from those that are displayed in Western museum? How can we reconcile such differences? What is the relationship between the different types of authenticities?

2. INTERROGATING THE POSTCOLONIAL

2.1 Art as an act of decolonisation: perspectives from and on the Global South

Convenor: Mario Pissarra, Africa South Art Initiative (ASAI) and University of Cape Town, Mario.pissarra@uct.ac.za

The struggle for decolonisation is one of the critical themes of the 20th century. Across the globe visual arts practitioners (artists, educators, historians, curators, publishers, administrators, etc) have contributed to and been impacted on by struggles for self-determination. The struggle for decolonisation does not end with national liberation in the political sense but persists in the economic and cultural spheres. Whether visual arts practitioners have been active, passive or even resistant subjects in these struggles, the art, exhibitions, and publications produced in these contexts will inevitably reference issues that can be read as part of the broader struggle for cultural identity.

Decolonisation is both an ongoing historical process and a discourse. The discourse typically invokes contested notions such as cultural imperialism, authenticity, indigeneity, traditionalism, ethnocentrism, nationalism, modernity, assimilation, synthesis, hybridity, and globalisation.

While decolonisation does manifest literally in artists' choices of themes, images and symbols, it also manifests in quests to generate new visual languages. These include questions of style, form and materials. Critical assessments of the purposes of art and its public are also important to consider, as is the transformation of existing art institutions, or the establishment of new ones. The relationship to the new nation-state of practitioners who see their work, as Wilfredo Lam put it, as 'an act of decolonisation' is also a critical question, particularly when the new state assumes a neo-colonial character. The relationships that are privileged and cultivated with the artists and art events of other nation states are also important, since this calls into question the extent to which the struggle for dignity that led to national liberation is accompanied by a struggle to transform the eurocentrism of the international art world.

This panel aims to explore how decolonisation impacts on the visual arts and

how visual arts practitioners contribute as subjects to the ongoing process of decolonisation. Case studies, singular and comparative, from across the world are particularly welcomed. The emphasis will be on periods before and after political independence, as well as those dealing with the incomplete project of decolonisation in more recent times. While most case studies will come from the South, latitude will be extended to case studies from the North where equivalent struggles for self-determination occur. Critical approaches to the value and limits of applying decolonisation as a discursive frame are also welcome.

2.2 About the epistemological and political consequences of some uses of the 'Latin American Art' label

Convenors: Maria Iñigo Clavo, University of Essex, miclavo@essex.ac.uk and Jaime Vindel, University of León, vindel.jaime@gmail.com

What is the counterpoint to the homogeneous "Latin American art" label? How can art history in a Latin American context challenge traditional Western art history? In the Cold War context during the 1960s and 1970s some left-wing movements started to argue about the importance of creating a continental idea of 'Latin America identity, independent culture and thought', and following it, an idea of 'Latin American art'. These categories have been strongly questioned during the last couple of years, but new approaches still coexist with the former ones. As a result the study field of Latin American art history is often trapped in old problems. Sometimes, the lack of studies about twentieth-century Latin American art has been compensated by a nostalgic and latino-americanist memory of these practices. That outlook does not allow an understanding of the singularity of each national or local case. Moreover, this epistemological problem hampers a critical approach to the past. We think this critical approach is needed for the political reactivation of such practices in the present. If we are able to share our experiences and knowledge about Latin American art with other South art histories, we could find new ways to rethink the common problems and to overcome some blind spots of our discipline. Detecting through dialogue similarities, differences and connections between African and Latin American contexts, we will be able to define a new concept of "South", without falling into the reductionism of the close identities constructed around geographical references.

3. INTERROGATING THE GLOBAL SOUTH

3.1 Problematising the Global South

This session will be hosted by the Wits Institute of Social and Economic Research (WiSER) at the University of the Witwatersrand. For more information contact the convenors, Abebe Zegeye, Director of WiSER, Abebe.zegeye@wits.ac.za or Sarah Nuttall, sarah.nuttall@wits.ac.za

4. THE POLITICS OF DISPLAY AND COLLECTING

4.1 Changing museums, changing art histories

Convenor: Jillian Carman, University of the Witwatersrand and University of Johannesburg, jillianc@bellatrix.co.za

Art museums in South Africa are fairly new in global terms. The earliest public art collections of the late nineteenth century were negligible in size, quality and housing, and the first significant art museum only opened in 1910. It comprised items made by white artists from British and European, particularly French, schools that illustrated the history of modern Western art. It did not feature a South African school. For most of the twentieth century South African art museums collected and displayed the works of white artists, local and foreign, with a principal aim of validating local art in terms of Western art movements. Art made by black people practising in a Western style was generally excluded from public collections until the second half of the century. Indigenous or 'native' art was not included in art museums for most of the century; it was considered ethnographic and featured in ethnographic, natural history and general museums. But during the last twenty-odd years of the twentieth century a change occurred in the museum and the academy. Indigenous artefacts were moved from ethnographic to art collections, and the study of them entered local art history discourses. The certainties of a Western history of art were disturbed. Indigenous art-making required a central role, something which had previously been denied it, in both the art museum and the history of art. These challenges are not unique to South Africa.

Papers are invited that address issues of change in art museums and the history of art in former colonies, the Global South and countries where first nation or immigrant groups trouble past certainties. Subjects may include - but are not limited to - the early practice of favouring foreign above local fine art and how this was adapted in collections and histories; the challenges posed to traditional Western art history with regard to notions of authenticity, individuality, artistic processes, methods and theories; the discourses of indigenous people's art practices, and how these impact on a changing history of art; the ideologies behind collecting and patronage; issues of repatriation of ethnographic items which art museums may now need to address; how is "heritage" understood, collected and displayed.

4.2 Africa, Africanness, and their representation in the contemporary mega-exhibition

Convenor: Royce W. Smith, Wichita State University, royce.smith@wichita.edu

Global mega-exhibitions have not only served as competitive and increasingly touristic epicentres of contemporary creative discourse, but have fundamentally altered what Okwui Enwezor calls the "politics of Spectacle" "re-defining the very nature of history as an increasingly

negotiable and relational" rather than an exclusively localised, construct. Yet, many critics argue that such exhibitions largely remain zones of expository privilege—fashioning a false sense of global interconnectedness and visibility that often camouflages or altogether ignores ongoing issues of marginalisation and colonialist 'readings' of African history. Within the contemporary mega-exhibition's infrastructure, regional and national approaches to artistic representation are often denied African practitioners—whose works are instead subsumed under a totalising and undifferentiated rubric of "Africanness". Are the true underpinnings of the contemporary mega-exhibition uncomfortable, colonialist reifications of Western, modernist exhibition practices (as exemplified in the Great Exhibition of 1851), or are they strategic confrontations of such exclusionary and hierarchical traditions? How successfully have curators, artists, and the viewing public engaged with the concerns and agendas of African practitioners within specific articulations of biennales and mega-exhibitions? If Rasheed Araeen has openly questioned why African artists so desperately seek a 'piece of Venice pie' (referring to their inclusion in the Venice Biennale's proceedings), what other representational mechanisms exist or might exist in the future to adequately showcase African artistic interests—both within and outside the African continent?

This panel invites papers that engage with these issues and others, not only from the standpoint of Africa and Africanness as raised within non-African biennales and mega-exhibitions, but also from the perspective of new, emerging, potential, and defunct mega-exhibitions within the African continent. Views from critics, curators, historians, administrators, and artists are invited as this panel utilises Africa's local, regional, national, and continental concerns as reflected in the contemporary art world as the re-oriented foundation for discussions about mega-exhibitions and their futures.

5. CULTURAL PRODUCTION

5.1 Where to put baskets in an art gallery? The place of traditional cultures in art history

Convenor: Kevin Murray, Melbourne University, kevin@craftunbound.net

Conventional Western approaches to art history focus on individual creativity. The individual artist is seen as the ultimate site for development of new art forms. While inspiration might be drawn from collective traditions, such as Picasso's experience of African masks, the ultimate end of analysis is the product realised by an individual. This can be seen as part of a cultural economy that deals in a currency of genius, intellectual property and originality. The colonial process entails the extension of this economy into alternative systems where culture is more a matter of collective meaning and ancestral authority. Such methodologies have a home in the trans-Atlantic North, where traditional cultures are

rarely found outside of the modernist lens. In the Global South, however, there is sometimes a bifocal arrangement where modernity co-exists with collective systems. In the case of visual culture, craft practice contrasts with visual art as a form of production based on mastery of traditional skills rather than sparks of individual genius. In the North, much contemporary craft has been assimilated into modernity through the practice of the studio craftsman. In the South, craft is still practised in communities where it is grounded in collective identities, such as village, tribe, caste or guild. If art history in the Global South is to reflect the nature of its democracies, then it is critical that methodologies be adopted that account for art that has been forged through collective agencies, where it would be inappropriate to single out an individual as the sole representative. This could be seen to apply to forms such as telephone wire-weaving in South Africa, 'tjanpi' sculptures in the Western Desert of Australia, tapa cloths from the Pacific, Pattamadai mat weavers in India, Relmu Witral weavers in Chile. How can these collective art forms be incorporated into a history of art in the Global South? Some of the issues this raises include:

- How can innovation be accounted for within a collective practice?
- To what extent can Western institutions such as art galleries accommodate collective art forms such as village crafts?
- Are there productive ways in which individual artists can collaborate with traditional communities?
- How can what might be considered a traditional art form be given a diachronic reading through art history?
- How might individuals that emerge from collective settings to be granted status as 'living treasures', 'masters of their craft', or 'artists in their own right'?

This discussion is relevant to those working across the broader South, including African tribal arts, Asian programs for upliftment of traditional crafts, Oceanic models for dealing with traditional knowledge and Latin American forms of engagement with the so called 'pre-Colombian' cultures. Issues at play here connect closely with existing forums such as Journal of Modern Craft

(www.journalofmoderncraft.com<<http://www.journalofmoderncraft.com>>) and Southern Perspectives

(www.southernperspectives.net<<http://www.southernperspectives.net>>).

5.2 Tradition and innovation in Southern African textiles

Convenor: Marsha MacDowell, Michigan State University Museum, macdowel@msu.edu

Proposals for papers are sought for a panel that will explore traditions and innovation in Southern African textiles, using new technology for research on Southern African textiles, the African diaspora and transnational

influences on textiles, what is African in textile production, and philosophies of collecting and interpreting South African textiles.

6. ART AND 'PRE-HISTORY'

6.1 Archaeologies of art

Convenors: Sven Ouzman, University of Pretoria, Sven.Ouzman@up.ac.za and Pippa Skotnes, University of Cape Town, pippa.skotnes@uct.ac.za

Often, with a certain degree of species-specific arrogance, we maintain "art" as a hallmark unique to humans. But is it? In order to answer this question, we need to consider 'art' in a wide temporal perspective, perhaps as far back as 500 000 years. Within this time we then need multiple scales of analysis, from broad questions such as 'what is art?' to specific case studies by specialists, extending even to considerations of non-human art and art that is a product of human and non-human networking. While necessarily multi-disciplinary, understanding what are likely to be the multiple origins and developments of art can also help with disciplinary self-reflexivity. Archaeologists, for example, are not very good at "excavating" art. Currently, Africa is considered one of the homes of human art, but this oft-repeated assertion also amply demonstrates the considerable politics at play in the wider fields of origins research. 'Archaeologies of art' thus aims both to include substantive case studies, foundational questions, and a consideration of socio-political factors that reify human art. Papers are invited that address these concerns.

7. POWER AND POLITICS

7.1 Architecture and landscape

Convenor: Randall Bird, University of the Witwatersrand, randall.bird@wits.ac.za

In recent decades, the relationship between architecture and the natural environment has been explored by scholars in a variety of symposia and museum exhibitions. The exhibition, "In Situ: Architecture and Landscape" at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) highlights the ways in which changing definitions of landscape have expanded our understanding of the relationship between the "natural and the manmade". The exhibition examines a full spectrum of approaches to landscape by architects, including the modern movement's hostility to nature and the extent to which the "architectural avant-garde celebrated autonomy from nature", a disposition that led to a divorce between architecture and nature. Another theme is the more recently revised discourse around architecture and landscape and a contextualist approach to architecture fueled by environmental crises and exponential urban expansion. Current award-winning architectural designs, such as, Peter Rich's 'Mapungubwe Interpretation Centre' in South Africa, exemplify the potential of these crises for creativity in the Global South. In its more current

incarnation, the term 'landscape' encompasses the material, experiential, perceptual and imaginative dimensions that are at the heart of the creation of space in human societies. Moving beyond phenomenological traditions by questioning how political authority operates through landscape and its relation to architecture enriches our understanding of how space becomes charged with meaning. This comprehensive approach brings about an awareness of architecture and landscape that is less reflective and static, and more active and dynamic and provokes questions about how architecture, landscape and politics intersect.

This panel calls for papers that examine diverse attitudes toward the relationship between landscape and architecture over the past two-hundred years around the Global South.

8. CONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES

8.1 Unsettling hierarchies: women artists in South Africa

Convenor: Brenda Schmahmann, Rhodes University, b.schmahmann@ru.ac.za

Contemporary South African women artists frequently invoke concepts or ideas which relate to those influential on feminist practitioners in the "North" or "West". Kristeva's idea of abjection is often explored, as are issues surrounding maternity, the constructedness of gendered identities, memory as a strategy for writing new histories, the body as a site for asserting subjectivity, and numerous other theoretical or thematic concerns popular in America, Britain and Western Europe. But while works by females in South Africa may seem to have much in common with those made by their counterparts in the "West", it is important to recognise their crucial differences and how these are informed by the divergent experiences of their makers as well as the distinctive political contexts in which they were produced.

This session welcomes papers which explore how the particularities of South African histories and concerns inflect and affect women artists' engagement with concepts or issues that also enjoy currency in the 'West'. Complicating the relation between feminist art and theory in South Africa and in America, Britain and Western Europe, papers in the session will question implicitly narrow understandings that works by South African women are simply 'influenced' by those produced by their Western peers. If feminism reveals the ways in which power imbalances are embroiled in issues of gender, this session will reveal how feminist art history should also refuse a geographical/cultural hierarchical distinction – namely, the notion that women practitioners in the "West" or "North" occupy the "centre", the site of creativity and innovation, while those in other countries (such as South Africa) are followers and imitators on the "periphery".

8.2 Clothing, cultures, classifications: inventing self and other through dress

Convenor: Victoria Rovine, University of Florida, vrovine@ufl.edu

This panel will address the roles of clothing, a highly visible yet understudied creative medium, as a tool for classifying people and cultures. Papers will explore how dress practices have been employed both to classify and control others, and to challenge or subvert such classifications. Analyses of clothing at the intersection of cultures "locations and moments at which the identities of the Global South and the Global North are thrown into relief" are of particular interest. The panel welcomes explorations of both historical and contemporary dress practices, using a range of analytical approaches.

8.3 Who is entitled to tell the black artist's story in South Africa?

Convenor: David Koloane, Independent Researcher, davidkoloane@yahoo.com

The dearth of black writers and critics is a source of great concern. The recent spate of publications on the visual arts in South Africa has, irrespective of the individual writer's intentions and objectives, once more brought into focus the glaring inequalities which characterise South African society and its visual arts practitioners where more often than not white artists assume the dual role of referee and player. The problem is not so much that of colour but more of the authenticity of information and the validation of the expression and effort of the subject. It is often unimaginable that a writer who virtually lives in a radically different divide can honestly and objectively bridge the divide even within a so-called broad survey of South African art. Surely within the socialised postcolonial discourse a new vocabulary has to emerge in order to locate South Africa in the twenty first century.

This panel, which will take the form of a discussion forum, invites contributions that will address the problem of representivity. Issues to be discussed may include the concept of partnerships and collaborations between artists and writers, and Intensive writing workshops as part of higher education curricula.

9. PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

9.1 Between Seeing and Believing: Documentary and Archival Practices in the Global South

Convenors: Rory Bester, University of the Witwatersrand, rory.bester@wits.ac.za, Sean O'Toole, Editor, Art South Africa, seanwotoole@gmail.com, Dilip Menon, University of the Witwatersrand, dilip.menon@wits.ac.za

The two decades before the fall of the Berlin Wall represent an important period in the theorisation of the politics of 'documentary' photography as a visual practice, and raised vital questions with regard to aesthetics, gender, race, truth and modernity. But in the post-Cold War / post-apartheid period there have been few sustained theoretical statements on documentary practices.

The conditions for the contemporary production and circulation of documentary photographs in exhibitions, magazines and books has been influenced by two critical moments in the mid-1990s: the inclusion of documentary modes in contemporary art making, and an archival turn that has seen photographers increasingly engage questions of memory and remembrance.

This panel is interested in the intersection of the different "factual" possibilities of both documentary and archival practices. The panel seeks to explore the extent to which contemporary documentary practices in the global south might be preoccupied with social-realist modes in which archival practices plays a central mediating role. We are seeking papers that examine the different 'documentary' or 'factual' modes in photography from the global south, as well as how archival and other practices have ameliorated stasis and change within the genre.

Reference:

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