Wood: Natural Affordance and Cultural Values (Munich/online, 31 Mar–2 Apr 22)

Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich / online, Mar 31–Apr 2, 2022
Deadline: Sep 30, 2021

Aleksandra Lipińska, Kunsthistorisches Institut der Universität zu Köln

Conference
Wood: Between Natural Affordance and Cultural Values in Eurasia

Organised by Aleksandra Lipińska (Professor for Art of the Early Modern Period, Institute for Art History, LMU Munich) and Ilse Sturkenboom (Professor for Islamic Art History, Institute for Art History, LMU Munich)

In 'The Theory of Affordances' of 1977, the American psychologist James J. Gibson coined the term affordance to denote that which environment offers an animal [or a human for that matter] for good or ill. This concept resonated broadly within humanities and, more recently, especially within material culture studies. Wood can be understood as a natural affordance that is one of the most universally available materials in a vast area of the world. Wood comes with its natural and physical characteristics that determine its workability. The use of various kinds of wood is, however, not only determined by the availability and applicability of the material itself but also by cultural values and specific requirements within a society.

This conference aims at bringing together scholars from diverse fields within humanities and science to discuss similarities and differences, continuities and discontinuities in the notions surrounding wood in various cultural contexts within Eurasia until the "material revolution" that followed after 1900. We would like to address the question of the relationships or tensions between the naturally determined affordances of timber and their cultural coding.

Questions addressed may include, but need not be limited to:
- The relation between the substance and the produced object as a result of the tension between natural affordances and cultural practices
- Religious, philosophical and historical notions of wood in various cultural contexts within Eurasia and their impact on the application of wood in artefacts
- Relationships of wood with other materials within material hierarchies, as a combination in objects/architecture, or as a carrier of designs that may also occur in other materials
- The mobility of wooden objects and their impact in diverse cultural contexts
- The use of wood as a tool or medium, e.g. imprint
- The specificity of working in wood and resulting identities of woodworkers and their works
- Scientific/ dendrochronological analyses of wood and their impact on the interpretation of cultural meaning of wooden objects

The conference is planned to take place as an in-person event, but online attendance will also be made available in a hybrid format. As far as attendants cannot be reimbursed by their home institutions, travel and accommodation costs will be reimbursed by the conveners.

We kindly ask interested participants to submit, by September 30th, 2021, a working title, a maximum 250-word abstract and a short CV to Ilse.Sturkenboom@LMU.de and aleksandra.lipinska@kunstgeschichte.uni-muenchen.de

Reference:

CFP: Wood: Natural Affordance and Cultural Values (Munich/online, 31 Mar–2 Apr 22). In: ArtHist.net, Jul 15, 2021 (accessed Nov 19, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/34599>.