

Ugly Modernity (online, 8–9 Jun 23)

online / York, Jun 8–09, 2023

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The term 'modernity' signifies a brand new age, distinguishing human experiences and values as different from the past. From the mid-nineteenth century, 'modern life' began to denote transformations in all aspects, such as technology, economics, industry and urbanisation. In the cultural field, modernity is grounded in critical methods for creating new values to promote the progress of humanity.

The idea of modernity is often lauded as unique, original, innovative, avant-garde, and, within art history, as the grounds for contemporary art. There is an inherent problem in this conception, however, as it glosses over some crucial dimensions of the definition. What about the uglier aspects of modernity? What of the racism, sexism, industrialism, climatic damage, imperialism, colonialism, and waste?

If our celebration of modernity consists of a series of historical progresses, our interest in post-modernism would necessitate inquiry into these questions. By whom is modernity recognised as an advance of human history? Do people from any corner of the world consider modernity as a progressive process without discrepancy? What of the lesser-acknowledged yet pressing issues underneath the clean veneer of modernisation? Does modernity always promise us a better future?

This conference is organised by TFISM (Transition: Forum for Interdisciplinary Studies into Modernity). TFISM is a non-institutional platform for interdisciplinary conversations, exploring the idea of 'modernity' in its diverse fields of cultural studies. The organisation was initiated by three post-doctoral researchers who acquired their doctoral professions in English and Related Literature and History of Art at the University of York. They organised an earlier interdisciplinary forum, entitled "Reflecting/Reflected Modernity" in 2021. With the scope of 'modernity', TFISM engaged in intercultural sites, where understandings of modernity required specific contexts for embodying its dynamic, transforming, and reshaping entities. The term 'transition' suggests this ongoing process for identifying 'modern' as artificially made with relative matters, rather than a chronological frame of genre.

This conference will be held digitally, please register via Eventbrite: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/ugly-modernity-the-unseen-sides-tickets-606674047407>

For more information and the programme, please visit our website: <https://sites.google.com/york.ac.uk/uglymodernity-itsunseensides/programme?authuser=0>

PROGRAMME

DAY ONE - 8th June (Thu)

11:30 - 11:50 Opening Remarks

11:50 - 13:25 Panel One: Nationalism and Ideology in Visuality

Giulia Beatrice (University of Zürich)

Terror Comes from the Sky: Gas and Bombing over Ethiopia in Futurist Painting

Sara Vitacca (Bibliotheca Hertziana Max Planck Institut für Kunstgeschichte)

Bodies And Nature in Fascist Visual culture

Henriette Marsden (Humboldt-University)

Between Exemplary 'Modernity' and Tasteless Excess – Salviati & Co. in Berlin's Kunstgewerbemuseum

Dorothee Wimmer (Centre for Art Market Studies)

"Capitalism, Violence and Sexuality: The Ugly Sides of the Weimar Republic in artworks of the "Golden Twenties"

Q&A

13:25 - 14:30 Lunch Break

14:30 - 16:05 Panel Two: Otherness in Artificial History

James McDougall (Wenzhou-Kean University)

The Laundryman as a Global Figure of Abjection in US Cultural Nationalism

Thomas Britt (George Mason University)

Subterranean Horrors of Modern Detroit: Lost River and Barbarian

David Cruickshank (King's College London)

'That Great and Saving Illusion': Joseph Conrad, Djuna Barnes, and Colonialism's Grotesque Time

Kathleen Rawlings (University of Oxford)

"Ugly/Beautiful": Picturing the 'Unsightly' in Apartheid Johannesburg

Q&A

DAY TWO - 9th June (Fri)

10:00 - 11:20 Keynote Speech

Christopher Reed (Pennsylvania State University / University of Oxford)

Modernism and the Middlebrow

11:20 - 11:40 Break

11:40 - 13:10 Panel Three: Enforced Identity

Elliot Shaw (University of Georgia)

Navigating Modernity's Fragmented Self: the Disorientations of Leiris and Coetzee

Barbora Svobodová (Institute for Czech Literature)

Censorship as a Tool for Building a Modern Industrial Enterprise and Society: The Intervention of

Bata Company in Literature

Sebastian Muehl (LMDA Institute of Contemporary Art, Design and Architecture at Art Academy of Latvia)

Modernity in the Shoebox: Universalism, Aesthetic Ideology, and Utopian Imagination

Connie Sjödin (University of Oxford)

Mauvais Goût: Did Plastic Flowers Decolonise Algerian Modernist Art?

Q&A

13:15 - 14:30 Lunch Break

14:30 - 16:05 Panel Four: Dualities of Ugliness

Michael Hart (Lane College)

Necessary Degeneration: Serial Killers and Modernity

Vivienne Tailor (Claremont Graduate University)

Absurdism and Cannibalism as Political Satire: dos Santos's *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman?* (1971) & Yu Hua's "Classical Love" (1996)

Zoe Copeman (University of Maryland College Park)

Corpse Venus: The Deathly Aesthetics of Modern Pornography

Allison Leigh (University of Louisiana at Lafayette)

The Case of Eugène Delacroix: Misogyny and Modern Art

Q&A

16:05 Closing Remarks

Reference:

CONF: Ugly Modernity (online, 8-9 Jun 23). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 4, 2023 (accessed Dec 15, 2025),

<<https://arthist.net/archive/39441>>.