

Visual Approaches to Vodun and Vodou (Zürich, 14–15 Sep 23)

University of Zurich, RAA G 01 Aula (Main Hall, 2nd Floor), Rämistrasse 59, 8006

Zurich, Sep 14–15, 2023

Registration deadline: Sep 7, 2023

Niklas Wolf

Methods and Media of the Absent/Present. Visual Approaches to Vodun and Vodou

Vodun is a globalized spiritual practice and knowledge system which originated in West Africa; Haitian Vodou is one of its many diasporic adjustments, formed in the contexts of the Black Atlantic. For different reasons, Vodun's and Vodou's practices and imageries have been of interest to ethnographers, artists, and art historians – in the West and in the Global South. Images, through misrepresentation and demonization in research, museum display, photobooks, journalism, literature, and film, have deeply affected how practices of Vodun and Vodou are perceived. New academic and artistic approaches to Vodun and Vodou are challenging historic and contemporary views, methods and media. They also pointedly challenge the researcher's and artist's positionality.

The two-day workshop investigates the use of photography, public images, tangible manifestations, and other media in spiritual and artistic practices related to Vodun's and Vodou's networks from different perspectives: How could terms and methods of representations be adapted, following Vodun's and Vodou's epistemologies or ethics? For example, contemporary photographers connect and visualize the spiritual and material networks between West Africa, Haïti and the diasporas. How can the materials and forms of Vodun/Vodou be understood from interdisciplinary perspectives? How can the many tangible and intangible aspects of practice be represented in digital and material spaces, respecting the right to opacity?

This workshop aims to discuss the role and influence of different places, material forms, displays such as shrines, museums, or digital imagery. We will investigate how different actors are involved in the knowledge production in Vodun's/Vodou's discourses. Whose narrative or voice will be heard, how can shifts in meaning be made visible?

Organized by the team of the SNSF-research project "Conflict and Cooperation. Episteme and Methods Between Art History, Art, and Ethnology in the Performative Pictorial Practices of Vodun" (Prof. Dr. Bärbel Küster, Dr. Dora Imhof, Niklas Wolf, M.A., Stefanie Rubner, M.A., Berit Seidel, M.A., University of Zurich).

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To attend please register here (before September 7):

<https://www.khist.uzh.ch/de/institut/registration.html>

Only afternoon panels will be streamed online.

Venue: University of Zurich, RAA G 01 Aula (Main Hall, 2nd Floor), Rämistrasse 59, 8006 Zurich

Program

THURSDAY, September 14

9:30 am Introduction

10 am Keynote Elyan Hill (Dallas, TX)

Dancing Altars: Embodied Visualities and Domestic Enslavement in Togolese Sacred Arts

11 am Coffee break

Panel 1: Performing Matters

Moderated by Birgit Meyer (Utrecht)

11:20 am Meera Venkatachalam (Mumbai)

Dealing with Textual Unboundedness: Gorovodu Objects, Images, Ritual, and Performance in Southeastern Ghana and Togo

12:00 pm Angelantonio Grossi (Moraga, CA)

"It Is Humans Who Make the Gods": On Autonomy, Causation and Relations

12:40 pm Lunch break

Panel 2: Towards Different Representations. Art, Film, Experimental Ethnography, Autoethnography

Moderated by David Frohnapfel (Berlin)

2 pm Zainabu Jallo (Bern/Basel)

The Ethnographic Interface: How Not to Study Haitian Vodou

2:40 pm Alissa Jordan (Philadelphia)

Jè Kle [In a Vision]: The Productivity of Visions, and Visionary Critiques of Production in Haitian Petwo Vodou

3:20 pm

Dora Imhof/U5 (Zurich)

Heavy Homework: On Engaging with Leonore Mau's Haitian Photographs

3:50 pm Coffee break

4:20 pm Conversation Michaela Schäuble (Bern) and Sela Kodjo Adjei (Accra) Imag(in)ing Vodun/Vodou: Filmic Approaches to a Spiritual Practice

5 pm Sum up discussion: Framing and Positioning Research, moderated by Bärbel Küster

FRIDAY, September 15

9:30 am Conversation Gina Athena Ulysse (Santa Cruz) and Sasha Huber (Helsinki)

Sonic and Visual Activism from Haiti and Beyond: A Rasanblaj of Reparative Interventions

Panel 3: The Camera and the Archive

Moderated by Bärbel Küster (Zurich)

10:30 am Christopher Nixon (Wiesbaden)

Visual Justice and the Haunting of Colonialism

11:10 am Dialogue of two Photographic Positions

Moderated by Niklas Wolf (Zurich)

Laeïla Adjovi (Dakar): Bridging with Light. Photographing Orisha-Vodun Culture Across the Waters (Benin-Nigeria-Cuba)

Nicola Lo Calzo (Paris): The Right to Opacity: Photographing Vodun Tchamba in the Postcolonial Age/Time

12:00 pm Rita Mawuena Benissan (Accra) and Sela Kodjo Adjei (Accra)

Chieftaincy, Spirituality and Heritage Preservation: Visual Evidence of Vodun in Photographic Archives

12:45 pm Lunch break

Panel 4: Spaces of Negotiation

Moderated by Zainabu Jallo (Bern/Basel)

2 pm Keynote Timothy R. Landry (Hartford, CT)

Willful Things: Sorcery and Encountering the Ontologically Alive in West Africa

3 pm Niklas Wolf (Zurich)

Vodun's Visuals. The Imagery of Vodun in Shrines, Museums, and Photobooks

3:40 pm Coffee break

4 pm Kwame Akoto Bamfo (Nuhalenya)

Through the Eyes and Hands of the Mounted

4:40 pm Keynote Kyras Malika Daniels (Atlanta, virtual)

Spirits of the Jewel Case: An Ethics of Care for Vodou Sacred Arts in the Museum World

Q&A moderated by Gina Athena Ulysse

5:30 pm Final discussion and closing remarks

Reference:

CONF: Visual Approaches to Vodun and Vodou (Zürich, 14-15 Sep 23). In: ArtHist.net, Jul 27, 2023 (accessed Dec 13, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/39905>>.