

Spiritual Landscapes and Photography (Florence, 21–22 Oct 24)

Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz - Max-Planck-Institut, Florence, Oct 21–22, 2024
Deadline: Apr 2, 2024

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Spiritual Landscapes and Photography: An Exploration from the Caucasus to the Mediterranean.
Conference organized by the OSCOP project (<https://pric.unive.it/projects/oscop/home>)
Florence, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut.

The scope of the OSCOP project is to study and promote the collection of photographs of South Caucasian art and architecture taken by the research group of Adriano Alpago Novello between the 1960s and 1980s, now preserved in the Centre of Study and Documentation of Armenian Culture in Venice. The photographs show the monumental and natural heritage of Georgia and Armenia, in particular the so-called 'crystal churches' (Brandi 1969). With their pure forms, geometrically defined spaces, and central dome, they offer a highly articulate expression of 'architectural spirituality' in which the landscape takes part. Alpago Novello's collection is particular in its context. Together with his colleagues from Italy and the Armenian diaspora he recorded the Armenian and Georgian historical landscape at a time when the territory was politically and theoretically part of the Soviet Union, and any reference to the sacred and spiritual was excluded from the critical discourse on the natural and monumental heritage.

Beyond this, the photo collection raises questions about the specific elements that make a landscape 'spiritual'. What prompted people to define a landscape as spiritual rather than sacred? The study of landscape involves the consideration of the role of human interventions in its shaping, the perception of geomorphology, and of the interplay between human and non-human agencies, such as vegetation. Under which premise and in which ways is a spiritual dimension attributed to them? What is the role of architecture in the making and marking, as well as experiencing of, hierotopic landscapes (Lidov), or vice versa? While inviting contributions to the discussion of these and related questions, the workshop will also engage with photographic images and ask if photographs can stimulate or convey a religious, mystical, or ascetic experience – and, if so, how do photographs mediate such a 'sense of spirituality', for instance, through light, composition, scaling, proximity, or distance. Can strategies of 'spiritualization' (or 'de-spiritualization') be identified, which are site-specific, regional or transcultural?

Photographs, with their own forms of spiritual engagement require, imply or promote specific settings and dynamics of spectatorship. There may be a spiritual dimension to the personal experience of the photographer regarding her or his interest in capturing markers from the past (such as churches or khachkars), and also the spirituality of local communities around them.

The conference aims to cross-examine photographs of spiritual landscapes from various point of view, with the double lens of seeking innovative methodological approaches to study the interplay between nature, humans, artifacts, and the underlying transcendental relations on the one hand and the role of the spiritual in related photographs and photographic aesthetics on the other. Contributions presenting case studies that consider wider geographical areas, from the Caucasus to the Mediterranean, and which engage with broader spiritual frameworks, from religion to mysticism, are welcome'.

Please send a proposal of no more than 500 words, as well as a short CV, by 2 April 2024 to stefano.riccioni@unive.it and hoffmann@khi.fi.it

Reference:

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