

## Interpretation in the Visual Arts (Santa Barbara, 26 Apr 13)

University of California, Santa Barbara, Apr 26, 2013

Deadline: Feb 1, 2013

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The Art History Graduate Student Association 38th Annual Symposium  
University of California, Santa Barbara

Histories of Meaning/ Meanings of History:

Interpretation in the Visual Arts

With keynote speaker Whitney Davis, George C. and Helen Pardee  
Professor of History of Art, University of California, Berkeley

April 26, 2013

The term "interpretation" is a staple of our art historical vocabulary, and this symposium asks graduate students to question both what we mean by it and how we understand its place within the history of art and architecture. Interpretation has been defined as "the bringing into being of a considered text that, if generally accepted, causes the work of art that is its subject to be viewed in a certain light." This implies that interpretation is distinct from other modes of experiencing artwork, and in turn raises questions: what does or does not qualify as a "considered text"? What are the conditions for its being accepted or rejected? Theorists have suggested that interpretation—as distinct from understanding—implies a conscious sense of ambiguity and uncertainty in how a work of art ought to be construed; an awareness, that is, of the possibility of being wrong. Where and under what circumstances has such awareness been present in the history of art?

Interpretation in the visual arts has been a contentious matter in many times and places: the fourth-century Chinese painter Ku K'ai-chih thought it necessary to insist that "profound appreciation" of good painting requires no verbal interpretation, while in sixteenth-century Italy Michelangelo was alternately praised and blamed for producing images that do require interpretation. In the twentieth century, Clement Greenberg listed ease of comprehension as a defining quality of kitsch, while Susan Sontag argued in her essay "Against

Interpretation" that interpretation "violates art" and that "in place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art." In the meantime interpretations of all kinds—as well as theories of interpretation—have proliferated.

We welcome papers from all disciplines that grapple with questions of:

- standards of validity or correctness in interpretation, including the problem of authorial intention
- the history of engagement with artwork as mediated by explanatory texts
- difficulty versus ease in understanding art, and exclusion from knowledge of art's meaning
- the role and limitations of language in constituting and analyzing the experience of art
- the history of changes in the interpretation of objects across time, place and culture
- the distinction between judgment and interpretation, aesthetics and hermeneutics
- the relationship between intellect and emotion in responding to art
- the role of identity and ideology in the theory and practice of interpretation

Please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words to [bricker@uemail.ucsb.edu](mailto:bricker@uemail.ucsb.edu) by February 1, 2013, with "AHGSA Symposium" as the subject of the e-mail.

Reference:

CFP: Interpretation in the Visual Arts (Santa Barbara, 26 Apr 13). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 2, 2012 (accessed Jul 7, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/4129>>.