Living apart together? (Otterlo/online, 24 May 24)

Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, May 24, 2024

Lotte Kremer, European Society for Nineteenth-Century Art

Living apart together? The troubled and treasured relationship between nature and human beings in art 1789-1914.

With the growing realisation that nature and the earth's climate are at risk of being destroyed, this conference aims to centralise the interconnectedness between nature and human beings, by analysing the depiction of their relationship in Western-European art, including the effects of colonialism, during the long nineteenth century.

Within art, the natural world was long seen as a repository of motifs and forms from which artists borrowed to fashion their representations of social reality. Centuries of anthropocentric thinking, based on influential sources such as Aristotle's writings and the Bible, have ingrained notions that human beings have dominion over the world and its inhabitants and this was reflected in the depiction of nature in art.

Even in the long nineteenth century, such notions were questioned. Around 1800 Alexander von Humboldt had already indicated the interdependence between nature and mankind. In addition, with the discovery of geological time in the late eighteenth century, came the realisation that the earth was eons older, and that human civilisation only occupied a fraction of a great terrestrial span. Such notions were also adopted by artists. In 1847 Théodore Rousseau painted a landscape with felled oak trees, while men are in the process of cutting down others. Rousseau later stated that he 'wanted to arouse remorse on the part of people who unthinkingly chop down trees'. In the art dealer Boussod & Valadon's stock books the painting was listed under the title La mort des innocents. In that same year Rousseau's good friend the art critic Théophile Thoré attacked the French government for its mismanagement of the forest lands near Barbizon. Their actions helped lead to the Western world's first state-established land preserves in 1853. Some ten years later Charles Darwin corroborated Von Humboldt's thesis that all life is essentially interconnected and dependent upon each other in his Origin of Species. Moreover, with the advent of industrialisation and the enormous growth of the global population – the so-called Anthropocene – human beings' actions gained such power that the world's ecosystem is in danger of being annihilated. This realisation increasingly questioned man's dominant position in epistemological and ontological paradigms, in exchange for a more integrated approach which puts co-dependency of life first.

By focussing on the depiction of the troubled relationship between nature and humans, around the corner as well as overseas, including the fascination for non-indigenous flora and fauna, we aim to answer questions such as: did changing opinions on nature have effect on nineteenth-cen-

tury art? Did nineteenth-century art have effect on the changing opinions on nature? How was the relationship between nature and human beings depicted? Which role did the advent of working en plein air play in artists' bond with nature? Which role did ecology play in the depiction of nature? How did artists and critics manage to evoke their awareness of the changing attitudes towards nature in their work? Which role did colonialism play in artists' perception of nature?

Date: 24 May
Time: 09:45 to 18:00

Location:
Kröller-Müller Museum
Houtkampweg 6
6731 AW Otterlo
The Netherlands

Language: English
Tickets
Register via: https://forms.gle/aeEdFq1q52PnS34CA
Regular: € 40
Students and online: € 15

Programme

9.45-10.15
Registration, Coffee & Tea

10.15-10.20
Benno Tempel, director Kröller-Müller Museum
Welcome

10.20-10.35
Mayken Jonkman, ESNA & Rijksmuseum and Sara Tas, co-organiser & Van Gogh Museum
Introduction to the conference theme

10.35-11.15
Keynote lecture: Colin Sterling, University of Amsterdam
Museum Ecologies: Past, Present, and Future

Session 1, Urban perspectives
Chair: Marjan Sterckx, ESNA & UGent

11.15-11.35
Marte Stinis, Paul Mellon Centre
"My lovely London fogs". The Aesthetics of Pollution

11.35-11.55
Marie-Charlotte Lamy, University of Neuchâtel
The Universal Museum of Nature: Possessing the Animal Kingdom in Painting

11.55-12.15
Annie Ronan, Virginia Tech
Edward Kemeys' Last(ing) Buffalo. Preservation, Poison, and the Toxic Ecologies of American Animal Art

12.15-12.35
Rachel Sloan, Courtauld Institute
Pissarro in the Great North Wood. Impressionism and urban nature in London

12.35-12.55
Session 1: Questions and Discussion

12.55-13.05
Jannet de Goede, Kröller-Müller Museum
Introduction to the exhibition The Wood for the Trees

13.05-14.30
lunch and visit to the exhibition

Session 2 Facing nature
Chair: Rachel Esner, ESNA & UvA

14.30-14.50
Daniel Ralston, National Gallery London
José María Velasco and the Image of Mexico

14.50-15.10
Vicki Pugh, The Institute for Social Justice York St John University
Omissions of the nineteenth-century seascape. Exploring the 'Anthropocene' of Turner's Bass Rock and Edinburgh Sketchbook (1818)

15.10-15.30
Daniël Hendrikse, (cultural) historian
The view from the ice cave. Representations of Romanticism, exploration and the Anthropocene in nineteenth-century photography

15.30-15.50
Annemiek Rens, Drents Museum
'Full of the silent, gloomy heaths'. The healing effect of nature in Drenthe for Van Gogh and others

15.50-16.10
Session 2: Questions and Discussion

16.10-16.30
wrap up

16.30-18.00
drinks and bites

Organisation:
European Society for Nineteenth-Century Art, in participation with Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

Reference:
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