

## Contemporary Art as/in Pilgrimage and Sacred Site (New York, 11 Feb 25)

Faculty House at Columbia University, New York

Deadline: Dec 15, 2024

Linda STRATFORD, Asbury University

Symposium: Contemporary Art as/in Pilgrimage and Sacred Site, Tuesday February 11, 2025 in New York City, Faculty House at Columbia University.

From Buddhist Thangka painting to Iranian textiles to the art of European medieval illuminated manuscripts, artmaking as a way to experience an embodied pilgrimage is a practice shared among a number of religious traditions, rooted in the past but still very much a part of art praxis today across a diversity of media. This one-day symposium immediately preceding the annual College Art Association conference is sponsored by the Association of Scholars of Christianity in the History of Art (ASCHA). The symposium seeks to explore contemporary art as pilgrimage and sacred site as the foundation for a new interdisciplinary project that draws into relationship the wealth of research arising out of pilgrimage and ritual studies, contemporary art history and criticism, anthropology, and religious and theological studies, with a particular focus on how artists perceive and conceive notions of sacred journey. We invite papers, presentations, and case studies that point the way towards future possibilities at the intersections of these fields of inquiry.

The symposium's overarching theme will be presented by Keynote speaker, Kathryn R. Barush, Thomas E. Bertelsen, Jr. Professor of Art History and Religion at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University and the Graduate Theological Union, and author of *Imaging Pilgrimage: Art as Embodied Experience* (Bloomsbury, 2021), winner of the American Academy of Religion's Religion and the Arts Book Award and the Borsch-Rast Book Prize & Lectureship, who will provide a brief overview of some of the work done in this area to date, including ideas that have emerged from the William & Mary College Symposium for Pilgrimage Studies and a recent, groundbreaking panel on the "Art of Walking" at the 2023 College Art Association (CAA) conference, soon to be published. Barush's research explores the idea of the perceived transfer of "spirit" from sacred spaces to representations through a critical examination of contemporary art (including assemblages of souvenirs, built environments, reconstructions of sacred sites, and – most recently – photographs as saintly relics) created after or during pilgrimages with the intent to engender the experience for others. A pattern is emerging, Barush argues, in which artwork, experienced on pilgrimage, engenders (and – as a souvenir – helps to sustain) a sense of movement, connection, and *communitas*.

We encourage proposals that build on this foundation by looking at specific examples of contemporary art through the lens of pilgrimage, drawing on a wide range of artists working in a diversity

of media and practice. Are galleries, museums, art expos, and art installations the new “slow spaces” for spiritual sustenance and transcendent experiences? How are temples, churches and other “religious” sites transformed by artist installations intended to invoke deep spiritual encounter and healing? Topics such as pilgrimage themes, stories, and ideas, “journeying” through the engagement with art, and the contemporary art museum and gallery as site of pilgrimage are welcome.

**SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS:**

Proposals of no more than 300 words, accompanied by CV and a brief cover letter, are due by December 15, 2024 and should be sent by e-mail to both Prof. Ronald R. Bernier at [bernier1@wit.edu](mailto:bernier1@wit.edu) and Prof. Rachel Hostetter Smith at [rsmith@taylor.edu](mailto:rsmith@taylor.edu)

Previously presented or published papers, as well as papers already committed to publication, will be considered but should be specifically indicated as such. Acceptance of papers assumes a commitment to attend and participate. Notifications of decisions expected by December 24, 2024.

**Reference:**

CFP: Contemporary Art as/in Pilgrimage and Sacred Site (New York, 11 Feb 25). In: Arthist.net, Sep 23, 2024 (accessed Dec 9, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/42741>>.