

Silhouettes, Shadows and Masks as Thinking Models (Florence, 27–28 Jan 25)

Online & Florence (Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut & Villa Romana), Jan 27–28, 2025

Natalie Arrowsmith

Silhouettes, Shadows and Masks as Thinking Models: Reflecting with Fanon, Mbembe, and Mudimbe.

Transdisciplinary Workshop organised by Hana Gründler and Rosa Sancarolo.

Research Group Ethico-Aesthetics of the Visual. Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut in collaboration with Villa Romana

In his seminal investigation on the psychological, individual and social impacts of colonialism on people of African descent ('Peau Noire, Masques Blanc', 1952; translated to 'Black Skin, White Masks', 1967), Frantz Fanon centralized the signifying value of the experience of vision: of viewing and of being viewed. The author insightfully stressed how this dialectical optical interaction, departed from and projected onto the site of the body, fundamentally contributes to constructing assumptions of a supposed "otherness". The so described dialectical phenomenon of vision involves notions of Blackness, shadows, masks, projections, and reduction. A series of concepts, and their accompanying visualizations, that are fundamentally constitutive of the motif of the silhouette, a visual, technical, conceptual and last but not least political site of obfuscation, opacity, and suspension of appearances and identities, beyond the enunciative trace of its contouring outline.

Thinking with and building on these notions and connections, we want to reflect further together on the different ways in which the visual and conceptual paradigm of the silhouette and its related concepts such as shadow and mask have been adopted and re-signified as kaleidoscopic thinking models by thinkers and poets like Frantz Fanon, Audre Lorde, Achille Mbembe and Valentine-Yves Mudimbe, and artists and like Kara Walker, William Kentridge, and Belkis Ayón, to name but a few. What (visual) language do the above-mentioned authors use in order to question the violent dimensions of the paradigm of otherness? What is the importance of figurative language and aesthetic experience in this rethinking of corporeality and identity? During this transdisciplinary workshop we aim to reflect upon, question, and/or dismantle philosophical and art-historical episodes, experiences, and narratives of colonialism and oppression, negotiation and contestation, empowerment and resistance.

PROGRAM

Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut
Palazzo Grifoni Budini Gattai

Via dei Servi 51, 50122 Firenze

14.30 – 15.00

Welcome and Introduction

Hana Gründler and Rosa Sancarolo (KHI – MPI)

Aesthetics of Modernities

Chair: Larissa Maria Müller

15.00 – 15.30

Ruri Kawanami (Freie Universität and Humboldt University, Berlin)

Drawing “Asiatic” Bodies in Grids, Lines and Silhouettes: Negotiating Corporeal Identity in Japanese Art Education, 1890-1930

15.30 – 16.00

Bärbel Küster (University of Zürich)

Silhouette as Solution? Historical Reflections on Masks between Critique, Enhancement and “Primitivism” in the 1950s

Break

Resistance between Material and Immateriality

Chair: Daniel Tischler

16.30– 17.00

Vera-Simone Schulz (Leuphana University and KHI–MPI)

Immateriality as Mode of Resistance. Countering Silhouettes of Exploitation and Oppression

17.00 – 17.30

Giuseppe Capriotti (University of Macerata)

Silhouettes and Swahili Fabrics for a Post-colonial Kenyan Identity. Peter Ngugi’s Art against Corruption, Misogyny and Homophobia

Break

18.00 – 18.30

Steyn Bergs (Utrecht University)

Shape and Shadow: Prelude to Nelson Makengo’s 'Nuit Debout'

28 January 2025

Villa Romana

Via Senese 68, 50124 Firenze

9.30 – 11.00

Welcome

Elena Agudio and Mistura Allison (Villa Romana)

Common Reading Session (in person)

Break

Memory and (In-)Visibility

Chair: Oliver Aas

11.30 – 12.00

Azar Emami Pari (University of Passau)

Masked Identities and Silhouetted Histories: The Representation of Enslaved Africans in Qajar Photography

12.00 – 12.30

Sophie Lynch (University of Chicago)

The Blur of Twilight Labor: Photography, Visibility & Johannesburg's Night Workers

12.30 – 13.00

Alexandre Diallo (Independent Lecturer and Researcher)

Reframing the Silhouette: Race, Space, and Memory in Alice Diop's *Nous*

Break

13.30 – 14.00

Film Screening of 'Toil' by Helena Uambembe (2021)

Introduced by Mistura Allison and Elena Agudio (Villa Romana)

This will be a hybrid event.

To participate online please register in advance via Zoom:

<https://eu02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/IYJNHgxxTDMGZpJTdgr65w#/registration>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

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Reference:

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