

Objects, Objectives, Objections (CAA, 12–15 Feb 2014)

Chicago, CAA Annual Conference, Feb 12–15, 2014

Deadline: May 6, 2013

Bibiana Obler

Objects, Objectives, Objections:

The Goals and Limits of the New Materialisms in Art History

Our colleagues in the rest of the academy seem suddenly to be in thrall to things. Scholars in fields ranging from political theory to literature are moving away from an understanding of the world centered on people and texts, and towards a reconsideration of the interrelationships among all things, including humans. Artists and art historians, having always attended to the confluence of things and people, seem to be welcoming this shift with a mixture of delight and circumspection. It is our contention that artists and art historians, attuned to the specificity and uniqueness of our objects of study, can enrich and productively complicate New Materialist ideas. The ontological range of our objects of study is staggering, from unworked rocks that have been transfigured solely by their translation in space, through alchemical mixtures of organic and inorganic materials to make pigments, which in turn are used to represent other objects, to highly contingent digital and conceptual works that nearly shed any semblance of “thingness.” The objects of our study are in a constant state of flux.

We would like to take stock of the opportunities afforded art and its history by what might collectively be called the New Materialisms. What do the latest interdisciplinary theories (such as eco-criticism, actor-network theory, and object-oriented ontology) offer us? What can we learn from Jane Bennett, Graham Harman, Bruno Latour, et al.? What do art and art history contribute to this developing critical mode?

This panel seeks papers representing a mix of perspectives examining subject matter from diverse historical periods and geographical locations. Presentations may model New Materialist approaches, whether in artistic practice, art history, curatorial work, or criticism. Others might take a more theoretical or historiographic tack, analyzing the role of New Materialism in art history and suggesting possible ways forward, or investigating whether New Materialism offers anything different from earlier philosophical trends, such as vitalism, which had its own impact on art and art history during the twentieth century. Still others might take a critical stand: some art historians, for example, worry that objects should not be endowed with anthropomorphic agency. Does a New Materialist approach flatten distinctions between animate and inanimate matter? If so, is that a good or a bad thing? We welcome and encourage debate.

For further information and application form, see:

<http://www.collegeart.org/proposals/2014callforparticipation>

Please send an abstract of one to two double-spaced pages, cover letter, CV, and application form to both:

Bibiana Obler
Assistant Professor, Dept. of Fine Arts and Art History
George Washington University
bobler@gwu.edu

Benjamin Tilghman
Assistant Professor, Dept. of Art and Art History
Lawrence University
benjamin.c.tilghman@lawrence.edu

Reference:

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